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JABEZ OLIPHANT;

OR,

THE MODERN PRINCE.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET,

Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

1870.

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JABEZ OLIPHANT.

BOOK II.—*Continued.*

MR. OLIPHANT'S POWER AT ITS HEIGHT.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE.

FRANK was confined to his room for nearly two months, but had no lack of visitors ; Fothergill, Highside, and others doing their best to amuse him. Seemingly, too, he found much to interest him even in the footsteps and voices outside, and sometimes was more excited by them than the doctor, if he had known, would have judged

beneficial. This morbid fancy disappeared, however, during the two last weeks of his confinement, when it also so happened that Kate was away from home.

When he was able to leave his bedroom, his first visit was naturally to his studio, and there, happily engaged in painting, he spent the greater part of the next three weeks. Kate came back at last, a few days before Christmas ; but as she arrived late at night Holden had retired to rest. The next morning, however, after breakfasting in bed, he had just settled himself to work in his studio when he heard a gentle tap at the door, and, on his saying "Come in," it was opened by the young lady herself. He rose in considerable surprise and pleasure, and hastened to welcome her.

"It is only your truant pupil, you see, Mr. Holden," said Kate ; "may I come in for a minute?"

"I shall be only too proud, Miss Oli-

phant," answered Holden, and Kate thought he was still very weak, for his hand shook as he placed a chair for her.

"Thank you, I must not stay ; you are not accustomed, I imagine, to have your camp stormed by ladies ; and—and I do not know whether I did right to come without mamma, but, now that you are visible, I could not rest till I had thanked you for my life. Mr. Holden, how am I to do it ? I have not words, but indeed I am very grateful."

Kate stopped and was deeply affected. Frank said gaily :

"I tell your uncle the farmer ought to be prosecuted for not making his poles stronger."

She shuddered visibly. "It was most noble ; did you think you could rescue me when you sprang in ?"

"Oh, I thought there was just a chance ; but I determined that at any rate—"

"What ?" she asked, as he hesitated.

“Well, that at any rate we would sink or swim together,” he said with a kindling eye. “We might have given a name to the Force, perhaps ; but pshaw, it was but a trifle to what one might do on occasion. The next thing I mean to do is to get a picture into the Academy—an infinitely harder job, you know.”

“Ay, but besides thanking you, I have to ask your pardon for my being so cross to you just before. If you had been drowned, I should never have forgiven myself what I said.”

“Pooh, pooh, Miss Oliphant ; have you seen my last sketches ?” and he bustled about to show them.

“This is very pretty,” said Kate, at length ; “I should like to copy it, when you are strong enough to take me in hand again.”

“I will leave it for you, then ; I think of bidding you good-bye to-morrow.”

“To-morrow, Mr. Holden! why?” exclaimed Kate; and then she coloured a little at the anxiety she had betrayed.

“Well, I am nearly strong again now, and your people must be thoroughly tired of nursing me: they have been very kind.”

“As if they could have been otherwise! I shall speak to my uncle; we will not have you turned out the moment you are able to fly. I am only sorry your visit has been so unfortunate for yourself; do not give people reason to say also that we are ungrateful.”

“I do not look upon my visit as unfortunate at all. I am a very lucky fellow, you know, and I shall always think it the greatest stroke of luck I ever had that I was able to be of service to you.”

“But——”

“Nay, Miss Oliphant, I must go, for reasons many and weighty; I should be glad to stay if I could honourably.”

“ You might favour us with your reasons at any rate,” said Kate : “ how honourably ?”

Frank saw that he had committed himself, and tried to laugh it off.

“ Oh, I am a very fantastic fellow in my notions. But, indeed, I must go. Here are one or two sketches still which you have not seen.”

Kate pressed him no more, and examined them in silence.

“ But what is this large canvas you have here with its face to the easel, Mr. Holden? May I see it ?” and before he knew how to stop her, she had turned the picture and was looking at it. It was a magnificent portrait of herself, in which the artist had evidently put forth his whole soul and strength.

Kate started and blushed, and stood now pretending to look at the beautiful face before her, now casting her eyes

demurely on the ground. The secret was out at last, and—would she have been a woman if she had been much displeased? But what a wrong thing it was to come here, and how she wished she could get quietly away again!

Frank, on his part, turned pale and bit his lip, but though he saw his affection was no longer concealed, he did not speak for a full minute.

“There, Miss Oliphant; you have now my reason for going,—with a vengeance,” he said, at last, sadly. “O, Kate!” he continued, “I live in you and for you. Some slight proof of the strength of my affection I have given you: would to God there were anything in the wide world, or in hell or heaven if I could reach them, that you would bid me do to prove it more! While lying ill, I have listened for your footsteps and the music of your voice, and if I heard them I was happy

all day and haunted by them through the night."

Kate was silent.

"People may say—and I have no doubt they will; I don't care for that," he added, suddenly replacing with his usual cheery voice the passionate tone in which he was speaking,—“that I am a fortune-hunter, because you happen to be rich and I am poor. Let them say so. I do not think you, Kate, will do me that injustice, and I call God to witness that I have loved you for your own gracious and beautiful self alone—that I should have loved you as much (more I could not) if you had been a beggar's daughter—that I shall love you in joy and sorrow, in sickness and health, in time and eternity. Oh, be witness, time and eternity,—be witness, God! of the truth of all this."

Still silence.

"And let it witness for me too that I

have tried so hard to conceal my feelings. I hoped to get away before I was forced to tell you. But either for my great misery or happiness, fate has been against me in that."

Silence still. He dropped her hands and raised himself proudly. "You will not speak. Then let my words also be considered unsaid, Miss Oliphant. You see I have not been afraid of your money, for I happen to think that a sincere heart, such as I offer you now, is worth all the money in the world. And it shall go hard but I will earn as much as I want for myself, and more. But come, I am doing you wrong now," he added, goodnaturedly.

"You are, you are," she whispered.

"Ah, yes; then it is that you cannot say 'No' because you think 'No' would seem ungrateful. Perhaps I am taking an advantage of you by speaking now; but, pray believe me, I would scorn any love that

sprang merely from gratitude, ay, even if it were you that felt it. There goes the first and the last of my kneeling before women," dashing off his knee a little dust which had gathered there; and then he began humming a tune with pretended carelessness.

"Come, Kate," he said gently at last, taking her hand again and looking anxiously in her face, "say either yes or no."

"Yes, Frank," murmured Kate so softly, that none but a lover could have heard the word. As she spoke she hid her face on his breast, as the most convenient place; and how soon his arm was round her, and what they said in the first burst of their rapture, the reader may imagine; for though Milton and Dante have penetrated heaven, humbler writers must be content with good solid earth. An hour passed like a minute.

"And do you really love me, Kate?" he asked for the twentieth time. "I can

hardly believe in my own happiness—it all seems like a glorious dream.”

“And to me, too.”

“Come now, confess ; how long have you loved me ?”

“Nay, I will not tell you, Frank ; but I think it was that which made me so angry with you on that terrible day, because you had altered your manner to me so much.”

“And I altered my manner because I loved you and did not wish you to know. Dearest, I will never alter it again.”

“But you must alter it—at least if this is to be your manner,” answered Kate, laughing and freeing herself. “And I thought, too, you held me a good deal tighter than was at all necessary when we were floating down the stream. Remember that, Frank, when you have to rescue me from another waterfall.”

“I should not mind a dozen in a day if they brought me such a prize.”

“No, sir; but this is not Turkey, and I am not going to share your affections with the eleven other rescued ladies, and you need not think so.”

“O Kate, I am content with you alone, for ever and ever; content! I am running over with happiness.”

“It comes out of your mouth, I suppose, and that is what makes you talk so much.”

“Well, I must talk on the happiest day of my life.”

“Good gracious, it is nearly twelve o’clock!—Frank,” the thought occurring to her for the first time, “what will they say to us?”

“Why, what can they say but ‘Love and be happy?’ Pooh, we shall be triumphant, you’ll see.”

“My uncle is very proud,” said Kate in dismay, as the difficulties of the situation rose more fully before her, “and my step-

mother will never consent, I am sure. They will look on you, I know they will, in a very unjust light."

"As a fortune-hunter, I suppose. Well, there is time even yet; if you wish to retract, Kate, do it now, for God's sake."

"Nay, I did not mean that," answered Kate, drawing herself up, and with eyes flashing pride and resolution. "You shall not find Kate Oliphant draw back from her word though her relatives and all the world were against her.—And I have no wish to retract," she added softly, and again leaning her face on his shoulder: "trust me wholly, Frank, as I trust you."

"Darling, I will, I do, till death."

"But I wish I knew the best way of breaking the news to them."

"I'll see your uncle this afternoon—he is out now. It would not be honourable to conceal the engagement a moment."

"There will be a dreadful storm. How

I wish it were over !—he has always been so kind to me.”

“Trust in me, dear : we agreed to form a Mutual Trust Company, Unlimited, did we not ?”

“Yes, but I wish we were safely through the court.”

“The court ! That implies failure at once ; no court shall sit upon me without hatching resistance, I can tell you,” returned Holden, as Kate at last insisted on leaving him.

Parting they seemed to tread upon the air,
Twin roses by the Zephyrs blown apart :
She, to her chamber gone, a ditty fair
Sang, of delicious love and honeyed dart ;
He with light steps went up—

but no, the artist did nothing of the kind, and his further actions must be deferred till the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

FRANK HOLDEN LEAVES.

IN spite of the intention of the lovers to see him as soon as possible, it was not destined that Mr. Oliphant should hear of the engagement for many days to come; for Frank, whose strength was unequal to the excitement of his interview with Kate, fainted directly after it, and was so ill for several days that he could see no one. But on the night before Christmas eve, by an effort he came down-stairs for dinner, resolved to ask Mr. Oliphant's consent either then or next morning. Fothergill, Dora, and Truman, however, were dining at the

Hall, so that he was forced to put off the interview till the next day, on which it was also necessary that he should start for London on important business.

Harry Highside was to have been of the party, but had sent an apology. He was much in love with Miss Oliphant, but had never yet been able to "screw his courage to the sticking-place," while her manner to him was not such as to give his shyness the least encouragement. Hence, to use one of his own expressions, he might have 'cooled off' altogether, had it not been for Mrs. Oliphant, who by her hints and flattery kept his affection at least simmering. After much prying, she had decided that her step-daughter's evident objection to Mr. Highside was due to a growing preference for Fothergill, who since the picnic had been on more friendly terms with Kate than ever. Mrs. Oliphant watched him, therefore, with a

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jealous eye, and on the present occasion, as Harry was not forthcoming, she contrived, by what she thought a consummate stroke of generalship, to have her young charge escorted to the dinner-table by Holden, leaving only Dora for Fothergill. Well, these remarkably diplomatic persons do occasionally outwit themselves as well as others; and, for my part, I always feel a little malicious delight when they do. However her arrangement pleased Mrs. Oliphant, and—as we may guess—it was also completely satisfactory to Kate and Frank Holden.

The latter spoke very little during dinner, for the only subject which lovers care to talk about—their selves and their love—was scarcely a suitable topic with other persons listening; but they read something in each other's eyes, which made the time pass agreeably enough. A stranger (fortunately one's intimate friends and relatives

know one so well that they notice badly) would easily have guessed the state of affairs from the artist's open face : the young lady had more command over hers.

As Kate passed her step-mother's room when their friends were gone, Mrs. Oliphant called her in. Her voice had lost its company-blandness, and was very sharp indeed. Kate wondered whether she had discovered the engagement.

"Well, mamma?" she said.

"Sit down there, Kate," answered Mrs. Oliphant, pointing to a chair by the fire ; "I wish to have a little talk with you."

"I hope it will be interesting then, mamma, for I am both tired and sleepy."

"You were neither tired nor sleepy while you were talking with Mr. Holden."

"Ah, that was at an earlier hour. It is actually past eleven."

"Past eleven or not, I have something to say to you—a caution. I thought you

very much too familiar to-night, both in looks, voice, and manner generally, with that young man. I confess I was perfectly astonished as I observed you."

"Which young man? Mr. Fothergill? It used to be Mr. Fothergill you were afraid of, I think."

"You know very well I mean Mr. Holden."

"Then why should you not call him Mr. Holden, instead of 'that young man'? Is he not a gentleman?"

"Kate, do not lecture me. I will not have it."

"Well, mamma, I was as friendly as I could be to Mr. Holden. Did he not deserve it after saving my life?" asked Kate, in the same easy and semi-defiant tone as before. She had made up her mind to tell everything, and knew there would be an explosion; but then she did not care much for her step-mother.

“Of course he deserves a certain amount of politeness after doing you a service.”

“A service! It was the most heroic thing I ever heard of.”

“As to the heroism, I imagine, *entre nous*, he thought the water was not strong enough to carry him down, and that he could secure a good deal of credit at a cheap rate. But even if he were aware of the danger, nothing, my dear, absolutely nothing, can put a man of this sort quite on the same level with yourself, and you must not allow a very natural and amiable impulse of gratitude to carry you too far. No one would be more grieved than yourself, I am sure, if he had the insolence to misinterpret your feelings. No, Kate,” she continued, “be polite to him, but dignified. Your uncle and I will take care that he is amply rewarded for all that he has done. I am sure no one would believe the trouble I have had in nursing him these three

months ; and I heard your uncle say that he intends to give him a very handsome *douceur* when he leaves—which I trust will be soon, as I am quite tired of having an invalid in the house.”

“Then, your reward to him, mamma,” said Kate, “will be presenting him with all the broths, jellies, and chickens for nothing ; and my uncle’s will be a sum of money ? But do you not think I ought to give him something, too ?”

“You are allowing your feelings on the subject to become too warm, Kate, I can see. But there might, perhaps, be no impropriety in your presenting him with some slight *souvenir*,—a book, or watch, or something of the kind,—through Mr. Oliphant. Perhaps it would look better.”

“A great deal better, I think ; but I have already decided on what I mean to give him.”

“Indeed ! One of your water-colours ?

That would please and flatter him as much as anything; besides, it would cost nothing."

"Nay, it is something rather better than one of my sketches, and not quite so valuable, probably, as a good book or a first-rate watch. Guess again."

"No; I am tired of your riddle, dear. What is it you are thinking of giving him?"

"My hand, mamma," said Kate, firmly and deliberately.

"Kate, you ought not to try and tease me with such foolish jests; and the subject itself is not a very proper one for a joke in the mouth of a young and modest girl."

"But it is not a joke at all. I hope you will give us your consent and blessing."

Mrs. Oliphant sprang up from her chair.

"Are you mad?" she cried, in a voice thin with fury.

“Nay, mamma, I think on the other hand it is the most sensible thing possible.”

“Are you in earnest?”

“Quite.”

“What, you think of marrying that young man?”

“Most certainly.”

“Never, never!—Are you going to propose to him yourself, then, may I ask?”

“He has already proposed to me, and I have accepted him.”

“He has!” said Mrs. Oliphant, faintly—
“O the viper, the viper!”

“You will please to remember that you are speaking of my affianced husband,” replied Kate, with cool superiority.

“Your affianced husband!—oh dear, I shall never get over this—your affianced husband! Never, Kate—never—never.”

“Well, of course, Frank or I may not live; in that case, the marriage will not

come off; but if we do live, I think it will."

"Have you told your uncle this wise, this notable project of yours?"

"Not yet."

"That is right. Deceive him as well as me. Poor, simple, good-natured man, little does he know what there is in store for him after he has nursed you up all these years, and loved you as if you had been his daughter. O the treachery, O the ingratitude of the thing!"

Kate herself turned white with anger. "Mrs. Oliphant," she said, "I will not be accused of such odious crimes. I will go to my uncle to-night and tell him. He will not think me quite such a wretch as you do, simply for falling in love with the noblest man I ever met."

"Yes, your poor uncle is asleep by this time; go and wake him, do. That will be kind also. That will be of a piece with all

the rest ;—when your treachery is discovered, rush in and disturb his rest. Go to your room, Kate, and on your knees ask God's pardon for all this terrible deception and ingratitude."

"Mrs. Oliphant, I have hitherto respected you as my father's widow ; but I am no longer a school-girl, and you cannot suppose I shall allow such language to be addressed to me even by you with impunity. My uncle shall judge between us to-morrow, since he is probably asleep now, as you say."

"Very well. At any rate, leave the room now. Go and pray for forgiveness—go and pray."

"I will go and I will pray, but my prayer shall be that you may see the matter in a proper light."

"And make up your mind that this marriage can never be—never."

"Indeed ! We will see what my uncle

thinks about that. Good night, Mrs. Oliphant."

It was an anxious night for both. Kate was grieved at the domestic differences she foresaw ; above all she feared the displeasure of her uncle, whom she loved very sincerely. But his utmost hostility would be better than even the appearance of that deception with which her step-mother charged her, and though she scarcely knew how to break the news to him, broken it should be, she determined, either by Frank or herself, the very next day. Mrs. Oliphant, however, slept even less than Kate. Some kind of connection with great people was as necessary to her as the air she breathed, and she was lost in indignation at Kate's throwing herself away on a wretched artist, when she might have been a baronet's wife. But the match should not take place if Jane Oliphant was Jane Oliphant still. She felt, however,

that she had made a great mistake in showing her anger ; for her step-daughter would now appeal to Mr. Oliphant in the morning, and since the old man liked his niece better than any one else, and had very fantastic notions besides about honour, virtue, and so on, might even coax him into giving his consent. The threatened interview, therefore, must be prevented at all hazards, and Mrs. Oliphant, after spending half the night in settling her plans, presented herself with the air of a penitent at Kate's bedside, before she was up.

“ Kate ! ” she said, wakening her with a kiss ; “ dearest Kate, I am very unhappy about what I said to you last night. Do, do forgive me.”

Kate blushed divinely, and, by way of answer, embraced her very warmly.

“ I am afraid I said a great deal which I did not mean against this attachment of yours. But the news came so suddenly on

me, and, do you know, I had thought of greater things for you. Ah, well—all that is over now, darling” (here Mrs. Oliphant began shedding tears ; few women had them better at command), “but I am sure that under the circumstances you will think no more of what I said when I was so—well, so naturally irritated ; will you dear ?”

“O mamma,” whispered Kate, “and you really will not oppose us ?”

“Nay, dear ; when he has actually proposed and you have accepted him, what is the good of opposing you now ? Of course, I do not mean to say that I like the match, or, perhaps, ever shall like it.”

“I think you will when you know him better.”

“Well, you have settled it between yourselves, and, after all, you are the chief persons concerned. We have been a very happy family, and we must not let a little

thing of this kind make a breach amongst us, must we, darling?"

"You cannot tell, dear mamma, how happy you have made me," cried Kate, with a tear of joy. "I know I can answer for Frank—we shall always love you."

"Ah, well; one cannot have everything one's own way in the world. I should have liked to see you a nobleman's wife; but, as you will throw yourself away, I cannot help it. You have not told your uncle, I think you said?"

"No, mamma, dear," said Kate, in dismay again. "How do you think that would be best done? Oh, I dread doing it; and I fear Frank's speaking to him equally."

"There is little doubt it will be a great shock to him. But, as it must be done" (here Mrs. Oliphant heaved another pretty little sigh, which called forth another affectionate kiss from Kate), "the best plan, I

think, is to wait till he is in a very good humour. If we take him at any chance time—to-day, for instance—he might fly up at once, and forbid your ever speaking to Mr. Holden again. No, he must be carefully approached and well managed, or we shall never get his consent. And all this will take time.”

“But—but Frank goes away to-day.”

“I would not mind that. You have acquainted me with the matter, so that there is nothing underhand in keeping it from Mr. Oliphant for a little while; and you and I surely understand your uncle as well as Mr. Holden does. We shall probably succeed better than he would.”

When Mrs. Oliphant inferred so plainly that she was herself an ally of the lovers, Kate was encouraged to ask with a little trepidation :

“Well, if Frank leaves without speaking to him, will you, mamma, be good enough

to undertake the thing—some time? I should be very grateful if you would.”

Mrs. Oliphant looked as malignantly triumphant as we may suppose the serpent does when the poor bird has dropped fascinated from the branch.

“I!” she said: “really, well, I do not know. But if you wish, of course I will. My doing so will be some slight reparation for my hasty speeches, dear. Yes, I will tell him if you like; but, of course, I cannot pretend to be a warm advocate of the match—you would not expect that—and I must take my own time about speaking.”

“It would be better to tell him soon, I should think, for fear he hears from any other quarter; and, O mamma! it would break my heart if he suspected us of any deceit.”

“Oh, I will be your witness, dear, in that case; and it is not likely he will hear anything. Poor man, was ever any one

so wrapped up in his papers and schemes ?”

So it was settled that Mrs. Oliphant should apprise Jabez of the engagement as soon as she had a favourable opportunity ; and Kate took care to see Frank early.

“ I don’t like it, Kate,” he said, when she had finished her story : “ I really think I had better tell your uncle myself before I go ; it would be more straightforward and manly.”

“ No, no, Frank : you do not know how proud he is ; and now that mamma has undertaken the business, it would not be respectful to her to alter our plans ; she would be offended if we did, and it is an immense comfort to have won her over.”

“ Hum !”

“ What language is ‘ hum ? ’ Carlylesque, or your Ruskinese ?”

“ Darling, I don’t like Mrs. Oliphant, and it’s no use pretending to like her ; and

I don't believe she'll be our friend ; and I think I had better see your uncle myself, and that's all about the matter."

"H'm !"

"And what does *that* mean ?"

"It means, Mr. Holden, that if you do not like mamma, I do,—I am determined to like her ; and that I do not see why she should not be our friend when she says she will ; and that she will make a much better ambassador than you ; and that—that in fact you are a goose, Frank."

"Swan, my lady means ; look at me closer, and see if I am not."

"Be quiet, sir."

"But as to my not making the better ambassador of the two, that is absurd. Just try me and see. I am naturally eloquent on a good subject."

"Rehearse your speech, then."

"I would kneel low before him and take his hand." ("You need not squeeze it

quite so hard," said Kate, laughing.) "Raising it affectionately to my lips—thus—whenever I was in danger of sticking fast, Sir, I would say, you are in possession of a treasure which California cannot buy, yet which I expect you to give me. It is, sir, the living Venus de Medici which you have in your house,—glowing as sunrise, beautiful as noon, modest as night. The spirit that spins the gossamer wove her hair, and the Naiad who dwells by Ribble-head crisped it and curled it till it was like the wavy shallows—never say I'm not a born poet, Kate—yes, the wavy shallows of her own stream in sunshine. There were no diamonds to be found bright enough for her eyes nearer than the moon, and her cheeks were painted——"

"Painted, indeed!"

"Well, at least beautiful for ever with the prettiest bit of rosy sunrise from the snows of Mont Blanc. And the cheeks

themselves were as soft as snow and as white, but—at least if I remember them well—not cold,—either of them——”

“ Oh don’t, you goose.”

“ Very fair and very soft indeed—nearly as soft as her lips——”

“ Well, Frank, at any rate you do not adopt the usual plan of cheapening the goods you wish to buy. Do you not see that by praising the Venus so much, you will make my uncle less inclined to part with it ?”

“ Ay, but hear me out. This, sir, is the treasure I ask of you. But I can give you nothing for it ; I have neither wit, nor money, nor power, nor genius. Yet I claim this marvellous statue as my own, because it must fall, you know, to him who loves it best.”

“ You are too high-flown, Frank ;—I should make a better envoy myself. I would say to my uncle, Uncle, you have at

length an opportunity of getting quit of me, and as it may be your last chance, I should advise you to let me go without any haggling—even if you have to give the man something handsome as well, to make him take me ; for you see, yourself, I have a rather poor face and a very bad temper, and I do nothing but tease and plague you all day. Think how quiet the house will be without me ! As for this unlucky young fellow, who in his innocence has made this magnificent bid of nothing for me, I know he is not worth much, either——”

“What, what ? I was very complimentary to you, Kate.”

“It does not follow that I should return the compliment, sir—he is silly enough, as he says himself, and if ever he had any wits they must have been washed out of him a couple of months ago : so perhaps you will say it is not very honourable to pass me off on him without due warning. But never

mind that ; you consider your own comfort. Besides, we shall match very well—two crabs on the same twig—and a strict course of petticoat government is just what he wants. So, Frank,” she continued, resuming her more serious tone, “we must let my mother do it.”

“Darling, as you like.”

“You know you can at any time write to my uncle if we do not make satisfactory progress here. And when shall I see you again ?”

“On my return from Italy, I trust ; if not, I come to marry you this day two years, if I am alive. It is your birthday, and you will be twenty-two on that day. Can you be constant as long as that ?”

“I will try,” answered Kate, looking very pretty disdain at the question. “And you will take care that no Italian beauty enslaves you ?”

“Nay, dear, whilst my heart beats, it

will beat for you only. I shall count the minutes till I see you again ; and when I come back I trust I shall be able to offer you something besides the hand of a beggar."

"O Frank, have you not a sort of presentiment of coming evil ? I have. I cannot repress it. I feel as if I should never see you more." And Kate clung to him with a vague sense of terror.

"You shall see me if I live, dearest, and I will write to you often. I am very sorry to go, of course ; but I never do feel such presentiments : I take things easily, and believe that sufficient for the day is the good thereof. Try to think so, too, Kate."

They exchanged locks of hair and a passionate embrace, and soon afterwards the artist started for London. Of course he bade good-bye very cordially to Mr. Oliphant, though he had many compunctions of conscience at leaving the house without acquainting him with his engagement, and

these scruples were increased when Jabez wished to present him with a cheque for five hundred pounds over and above his fee. "You will want a good deal of money in Italy," said the generous old man, "and you will really oblige me by accepting this little memento—of course I only mean it as a memento, but it will show you in some slight measure my appreciation of your courage." Holden, however, declined the money, and wished heartily that Miss Oliphant had not been so strongly set against his speaking out; but that being so, he could only take his leave, which he did accordingly.

BOOK III.

MR. OLIPHANT'S POWER DECLINES WITH THE MOB.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLES.

WE have traced in successive books the mode in which Mr. Oliphant established himself on the throne of Reinsber, and the measures he adopted when his power was at its height, his authority undisputed, and his state at peace. Alas! that I have now to record the gradual decline of his influence, first with the people, then with his aristocracy, and to depict him, always great indeed, but great

henceforth amid growing hostility, ceaseless war, and ultimate defeat—presenting a magnificent spectacle to gods and men of nobility in misfortune.

How the cloud arose between him and his people, it is hard to say ; for at first, like that seen by Elijah from the top of Carmel, it was no bigger than a man's hand. Some chroniclers assert that all the disputes sprang from the disposition of the Reinsber people, who had many wrong notions about equality and independence, and who at last got tired of submitting to a self-appointed monarch, even though his kinging it was all for their good, and at his own expense. Others, again, have said that it was Mr. Oliphant, who initiated an entire change of policy about eighteen months after his accession to the throne ; that then, feeling himself firmly seated, he became perceptibly more imperious, taking less care to hide his power under the

semblance of popularity ; and that he unconsciously acted on some one of the following maxims :—

First : “ Princes ought to make the art of *war* their sole study and occupation ; for that is the only profession worthy of a prince.”

Secondly : That it is better for a prince to be feared than loved ; “ for it depends on the inclinations of the subjects themselves whether they will love their prince or not ; but the prince has it in his own power to make them fear him, and if he is wise” (which Mr. Oliphant was), “ he will rather rely on his own resources than on the caprice of others.”

And again : “ Fortune cannot more successfully elevate a new prince than by raising enemies and confederacies against him, thus stimulating his genius, exercising his courage, and affording him an opportunity of climbing to the highest degree of

power. Many persons are, therefore, of opinion that it is advantageous for a prince to have enemies." Mr. Oliphant, therefore, according to some of my authorities, set himself to work, with remarkable wisdom and the greatest success, to make every one his enemy.

But whatever the cause may be, it is certain that the remainder of his reign was passed in a state of civil war, gradually increasing on both sides in fierceness and malignity ; and it is not difficult to discover the first outbreak of these angry feelings. This, then, I proceed to describe, not sorry to escape from the quagmires of conjecture to the solid ground of facts.

October had come round again, and one fine afternoon Jabez had been enjoying a long walk on the hills with Mr. Truman, who usually got on well with the monarch of Reinsber by the simple expedient of letting him have everything his own way,

and even at this price was not sorry to purchase his valuable friendship.

“I cannot make it out, Mr. Truman, why this Society of ours for the Propagation of Virtue does not attract more members. It is very odd,” said Mr. Oliphant, as they struck into the turnpike road.

“Probably the Reinsber people do not like change.”

“No doubt : and another cause may be that, in spite of my entreaties, the few actual members will not wear their badges of red ribbon in public. Even the prize-holders themselves—the very persons, sir, who have won the bronze medal—seem too indolent to put it on. One would think they should be as proud of it as of a Victoria cross ; and what noble emulation they might inspire if they would only wear the thing, instead of locking it up in a drawer for safety !”

“But you have several members already.”

“ Yes ; old women to whom we are kind at the Hall. Others say they will think of it. ‘ Think of it,’ the sluggards ! Ay, for months and for years they content themselves with thinking, while all the time Satan is not thinking, but acting—dragging the Reinsber people down every day faster and faster to perdition.”

“ Remarkably fine field of potatoes there, Mr. Oliphant,” said Joseph, pointing over the wall : “ I had a famous crop this year myself. Do you know that corner of my garden—”

“ Potatoes, sir ! How can you think of such things when so many immortal souls are in peril ?”

“ Well, but really now, Mr. Oliphant,” replied the other, his simplicity somewhat startled, “ potatoes are very good things—especially when they are new ; you can’t deny that ?”

“ Of course they are good : everything

that the Almighty has given to man is good—in its place; and the place of the potato is the dinner-table. Let us keep it there, and not intrude it on higher subjects—on the highest subjects which we can possibly discuss, the promotion of virtue and beneficence. You will excuse my vehemence, Mr. Truman, but I am deeply interested in this question; and I was about to ask your opinion on the best means of increasing our society.”

“I can hardly say, I’m sure. How would it be to give some really good prizes, or, talking of gardens, to let the members have a bit of land to work in at nights for themselves? There’s nothing so steadying as a garden; I’ve worked in mine these twenty years—dear me, it looks like yesterday when I came here from St. John’s! I don’t care much about flowers, you know, but for prize-peas and broccoli-sprouts—”

“The notion would not be a bad one,”

interrupted Jabez, "if I could bring myself to pay men for being virtuous; but that I cannot and will not do. Besides, I should be encouraging what I have observed to be one of the chief failings of the carles, their greed of money—the greatest curse, surely, that can befall any one."

Mr. Oliphant stopped for his companion's reply, and was gratified to observe that he seemed to be at last reflecting on the matter, for his eyes were fixed either on distance or vacancy. Joseph, however, had caught sight of a figure near the beck, and was about to exclaim, "I declare, there's Jim Stewart out to-day: he can't have caught anything, surely," when he fortunately remembered the unpleasant results of his late excursion into the potato-field, and checked himself in time.

"Certainly, certainly," he replied, turning towards Jabez with much less excitement in his face.

“No, Mr. Truman ; I begin to think I must take other methods with the Reinsber people. I shall be sorry to do so, but I have tried persuasion—I have tried example. Both have failed. As yet, the carles have neither learned humility nor virtue ; and I must try severity.”

“They are a stubborn set, Mr. Oliphant.”

“I have ridden a mule, sir, before now. But—would you believe it ?—I have tried to induce every several farmer in this district to join our society—spending hours in arguing the matter with each of them,—and all to no purpose whatever. I was able to give each man no fewer than eleven distinct reasons in favour of his taking the step, each reason capable of being supported by many conclusive arguments, and such as would make a refusal, one would think, impossible and absurd. They listened ; they could not deny there was much in my arguments ; they assented to my reasoning ; and

yet—declined to sign ! Come, you shall judge of the force of my eleven reasons yourself, Mr. Truman ; I will go through them one by one, with all my arguments ; and you shall tell me frankly whether any one but an idiot could resist them.”

“ Eleven of them ! ”

“ If you, sir—a clergyman—do not feel an interest in virtue, I shall be sorry to go on with the subject.”

“ Oh, no ; pray go on, Mr. Oliphant : I am much interested ; but I was surprised that you could get so many as eleven reasons out of the thing.”

“ Yes, sir, eleven principal, and three secondary ”—a subdued sigh from Truman—“ fourteen in all. The first was based on divine writ.”

An interruption, however, occurred at this juncture (Joseph looked on it as scarcely less than a special interposition of Providence) through their meeting with Wide-

awake and another farmer, James Hawthornthwaite, who were in a cart, but stopped to exchange a word or two with our pedestrians.

“Wee, wee, Jerry. What are ye two doing, Mr. Oliphant?” cried Dick. “Why, as ye com up t’ hill, ye looked like two turtle-doves billing and cooing. Were ye courting t’ parson? Aa, but ye’re a beauty, Mr. Truman.”

“How are you, Richard?” said Jabez, swallowing his disgust at the excessive familiarity of these Yorkshire farmers.

“Good day, Wideawake. And how are you, James?” said the parson.

“Fair-ish, Mr. Truman—as times gang,” answered Hawthornthwaite.

“Times! why, you know, now, you’ve had a rare season both for your lambs and hay.”

“Ay; just so-so,” replied James, turning over some silver in his breeches pocket

softly and lovingly, “if it’ll nobbut last.”

“You’ve doubted its lasting, to my knowledge, any time these ten years ; whilst all along you’ve positively been coining money, you farmers. What would you think if you were a poor parson with seventy-two pounds, four shillings and two pence a year to live on ? You would stare then, I think.”

“Well,” retorted Dick, “yan happen might stare if yan could git a five-pund note, like ye, when ye’re marrying folk, just for reading two or three bits o’ prayers out of a book. I wonder ye aren’t ashamed to tak t’ brass, Mr. Truman. Begow, if I ever hev occasion to wed again, I’ll mak ye throw me t’ burial-sarvice in an’ t’ churching o’ women an’ a lump mair at t’ same time, aw for nought—see if I don’t.”

Mr. Oliphant had been standing by in silence, but observing Dick’s horse and cart attentively.

“Richard,” he said now.

“Well, Mr. Oliphant?”

“Are you aware, Richard, that you are breaking the law by driving in this way, without reins, on a turnpike road?”

“Brekking t’ law, Mr. Oliphant!” answered Dick, jollily, and winking at him—he was quite unaware of the gravity and importance of the occasion, though it was destined to be the turning point in this history. “Don’t ye knaw ’at Reinsber Brow is too steep for t’ law iver to git up it?” The Brow was the long and abrupt ascent leading out of Reinsber to Sandy Topping.

“Then you are really aware you are acting illegally?” persisted Jabez.

“Whya, whya, what odds does it mak, Mr. Oliphant, driving wi’out reins on a lonesome road like this? Yan ’ud gang and gang for months, an’ niver meet auther cat or Christian. Ye’re t’ first living crea-

tures we've set eyes on sin' we started, barring yan lame jackass an' hauf a dozen geese 'at hed lost their gander an' wor set out on their travels to seek him. Isn't it sae, Jimmy?"

"Seven—there wor seven geese, Dick," corrected the other.

"An' t' horse is as quiet as a deead lamb, too, to say nought o' t' impossibility of his running away wi' sic a weight on t' cart as me. Nay, nay, we're saaf enough, thank ye. Will ye hev a lift? We can find room for baith o' ye, if I just move them corn-secks, and ye're a lang way fra Reinsber."

At another time Mr. Oliphant might have been displeased with Dick's well-intended offer of carrying him home on a common cart, in company with sundry sacks of hay and corn; but just now he was struggling between a sense of public duty and a feeling of kindness for the farmer.

As might be expected, however, he determined resolutely that no such private considerations must weigh with him.

“I am really very sorry, Mr. Wide-awake,” he answered, “but as I find that you are knowingly outraging the majesty of the law, I feel it necessary, I feel it a duty I cannot avoid, to summon you before the magistrates and fine you.”

“Ye’re boun to do *what*?” cried Dick, all astonishment, and with a considerable inclination to descend from his cart then and there, and administer a little wholesome chastisement to Jabez.

“Nay, now, Mr. Oliphant,” remonstrated the parson, who was equally surprised, “you would not do that surely? Consider,” he added, aside, “how friendly you have been with him, and what kind of a man he is—so respectable: you would set all the place against you, and he would be a very bad one for an enemy.”

“ Yes, I know ; it is very hard on me, Mr. Truman : but there has been too much of this criminal indifference, and an example must be made somewhere.”

“ Well, are ye still boun to do what ye say, Mr. Oliphant ?” Dick broke in impatiently.

“ I must, Mr. Wideawake. Of course I am sorry it happens to be yourself, but if it had been my own brother I should not have thought it just to pass such a thing over. And it is not even your only offence, for I see you have not your name painted on your cart.”

“ And why wor that, think ye ? or, rayther, what business is that of yours ?”

“ It is so far my business that I really cannot overlook the thing. I should consider myself an accomplice in your double breach if I did not summon you.”

“ Then summon away an’ be d—d to you : I’se surprised at ye, Mr. Oliphant. Gee up, Jerry.”

“Stop a minute, Dick,” said Truman, winking at the farmer: “I think if Mr. Oliphant took no notice of the matter for this once, you would take care to supply yourself with reins and to have your name properly painted on the cart for the future; would you not?”

But Dick’s blood was fairly up. He felt himself injured, and the fierce independence of his Yorkshire spirit was all in arms: “*Ye* save yer jaw for t’ pulpit, Mr. Truman,” he answered: “I’ll promise nought, an’ he may do as he likes, d—n him! Wha wad ha’ thowt of his sarving me sich a trick efter he’s pretended to be sa friendly? Gee up, Jerry, ye divil; are ye boun to stop here aw neght wi’ them two fools?” So the two farmers trotted off, Dick in flaming wrath.

Joseph tried to shake Mr. Oliphant’s purpose with regard to Wideawake, but failed utterly, and, before he got home, had

to listen to the whole of the eleven principal and three secondary reasons as well. One may suppose he did not find them as interesting as his own discourses, for when he reached the parsonage he was tired, and indulged in what was a rare luxury with him, a glass of hot brandy and water. Mr. Oliphant was also fatigued, and, after describing his walk, found himself exposed to another strong battery of remonstrances ; this time from his niece, who pleaded very hard for her friend Wideawake. As her uncle had considerable difficulty in resisting her, he was glad when the conversation was broken off by the entrance of a guest, to whom the next chapter must be devoted.

CHAPTER II.

LORD STAINMORE.

ABOUT a month before the encounter, which we have just described, between Dick and Mr. Oliphant, the latter was strolling through the village one evening, when he observed a stranger leaning on the bridge and watching the eddies of the stream below. Jabez enquired of the bystanders who he was, and was told in reply that he had been staying at the Red Lion for two or three days, but nobody knew why. Now Mr. Oliphant had a notion that all persons who came to Reinsber with no ostensible purpose, could be there for no good : at any rate, they ought to be closely

looked after, and their characters investigated. Accordingly, he stepped up to the stranger, who was well-dressed and seemed gentlemanly in his bearing. This, however, only increased Mr. Oliphant's suspicions; for, if ill-disposed, such a man would have greater power for evil.

“A beautiful evening, sir.”

“Very beautiful, indeed,” said the stranger, speaking in a soft, agreeable voice, and turning on Mr. Oliphant a remarkably handsome face with a pair of keen dark eyes. “I was admiring the view from your bridge and the clearness of your little mountain-stream. We have no such streams in the south.”

“You are from the south, then?”

The stranger bowed slightly, with just enough hauteur to make Jabez feel that impertinent or curious questions were likely to go unanswered: then he replied pleasantly enough, “It is quite Arcadian, the

whole scene—the stream, the cottages, the church, the rocks and woods, and your groups of uncouth but vigorous-looking rustics. How pleasant it must be to live here away from the feverishness of the world—dull though, I should think, remaining altogether!”

“I do not find it so, though I have been accustomed to London all my life. Reinsber is my native village, and I have come back to it in my old age, hoping to leave it a little better than I found it.”

“A very noble ambition, too: unless these outside places have some influential person to look after them, they become foul and stagnant—like the pools left behind by a flood—while the main stream of civilized life is clear enough. Our own little village was in that condition till it was taken in hand by my brother and myself, rebuilding the cottages and so on. We never thought, though, of giving our tenants a fine statue to look at, sir,” he con-

tinued, smiling and pointing towards the great figure of Hercules on the green.

The stranger's pleasant address, and his possession of landed estates (that magic 'stake in the country' which alone ensures respectability and virtue in England) were rapidly dispelling Mr. Oliphant's suspicions: a little additional respect was audible in his tones as he answered :

"I wish the statue were better; but, such as it is, I am not without hope that it has a refining effect on these rough Yorkshiremen."

"From that I conclude, sir, that you have been generous enough yourself to present the statue to the village. May I take the liberty of asking if you are the Mr. Oliphant whom I have heard so highly spoken of at the inn?"

"My name is Oliphant;—but, really now, I did not know that my humble labours were so much appreciated in the village?"

“You are mistaken, sir ; my good landlady talks of little else : and I am glad that I did turn aside here for a few days. I had been down grouse-shooting on our Scotch moors ; so, as I had often heard about the beauty of your Yorkshire dales, I thought I would see if they came up to their fame. I shall be able to give a very good account of them ; and I have picked up a few hints, which will be most useful at home, on the best mode of improving a country-place.”

The last sentence removed any doubt which might still remain in Mr. Oliphant’s mind. He was now inclined to be very courteous.

“If you like to discuss the question with me,” he said, “I shall be most happy if you could make it convenient to call on me at the Hall about eleven to-morrow : any one will tell you where I live.”

“I shall certainly do myself the pleasure

of calling, Mr. Oliphant. There is my card." Jabez, glancing down, saw that the name was that of Viscount Stainmore, eldest son of the Earl of Cliffshire.

"I see I had nearly made a sad mistake, my lord," he said, bowing low and smiling, but without the slightest touch of subserviency. "When I came up I was really rather at a loss what to think of you, and it is quite necessary in a place like this to keep a vigilant eye on the intercourse of the inhabitants with persons from the outside world."

"Very proper, certainly," replied Lord Stainmore—with a laugh, and a flash in his dark eyes. "And so you thought me rather a suspicious character? I hope you did not see any trace of hoofs and a tail, at any rate, Mr. Oliphant?"

The latter laughed also: "No, but I thought you might possibly be some one who wished to open mines, or set up a

theatre, or buy land for a great hotel, as ours is a pretty neighbourhood; and I should question the moral advantage of such things to our district, however lucrative they might be."

"Well, I give you my word of honour, I have no such intentions," replied the other. "I am very happy, however, that this doubt has given me the pleasure of your acquaintance. One of the matters I wish to talk over with you, is some Society which I hear you have established in Reinsber." Though Jabez did not observe it, there was a very humorous expression on Lord Stainmore's face.

"Ah, my Society for the Propagation of Virtue? I certainly flatter myself that I have hit on a good idea there, and one which, I think I may say without vanity, deserves at any rate consideration."

"It is one, if what I hear of it be correct, which deserves to be not only con-

sidered, but widely known throughout Great Britain. It would be extraordinary, would it not? if a revolution in our whole social system sprang from a little village like Reinsber. Yet such a thing would not be without precedents. Excuse my saying it, Mr. Oliphant, but you must not be selfish and keep your best thoughts to yourself: you really must make your scheme public."

"Well, now, it is very odd," said Jabez eagerly, "but I had thought more than once of doing so. The only difficulty is as to the best means of securing public attention."

"But has no way of meeting the difficulty occurred to you, when you have so deeply and ably considered the whole subject?"

"I have thought of several," answered Mr. Oliphant. "My first idea was a bold one, I grant; but I have been accustomed to commercial transactions all my life, and

the stream will run in its old channel. It was nothing less, my lord, than a grand Joint Stock Association."

"What, for the promotion of virtue?" asked the other, hardly able to resist a laugh.

"Yes. And after all, what are our great Bible and Missionary Societies, our Societies for relieving distress, our charities generally—what are all these but Joint Stock Associations, differing from those to which the name is commonly applied only in this, that the subscribers expect to receive interest on their money not in the present life, but in another? If I lend a hundred pounds to a railway, I know that I shall receive my five per cent immediately; and if I put a hundred pounds in the subscription-box of a hospital, I do it, knowing equally that for my money I shall get value—though not money value, perhaps, and not in my lifetime: I have unlimited faith in the invest-

ment, and can afford to wait; that is all the difference. But with regard to my own scheme, I know how uncertain a thing mere charity is, and I was unwilling to trust to it. But I thought it possible that many benevolent persons might be inclined to take fifty-pound shares in such an undertaking, with the fair prospect, as it seemed to me, of moderate interest for their capital."

"In this life, do you mean, or the next, Mr. Oliphant—if you will excuse my interruption?"

"Oh, in this life—in pounds, shillings, and pence. As nearly as I can calculate, the return to the shareholders would be at the rate of two and a half per cent. The members (of whom it would of course be necessary to have a great many, if the plan is to succeed) would only be expected to contribute, each of them, a shilling a year, and for this sum any one would be quali-

fied to compete for the valuable prizes which we should then be enabled to offer the virtuous. The surplus of our income, after paying these prizes and other expenses, would be sufficient, even if we calculate only on two hundred thousand members, to pay two and a half per cent to the shareholders, as I said ; but I will show you the figures at the Hall. However, my last notion, which is more commonplace, was simply to publish a book on the subject."

"I trust you will, Mr. Oliphant, and allow me to subscribe for twenty or thirty copies ; I have several friends who would be delighted with it. But the air is getting rather chilly, is it not ? So we will resume our discussion to-morrow, if you please. *Au revoir.*"

The interview next morning was so pleasant on both sides that it ended in Mr. Oliphant's inviting Lord Stainmore to

spend a week or two at Reinsber Hall. His portmanteau and valet therefore duly arrived there from the inn, to the huge delight of Mrs. Oliphant, who was wonderfully happier for the pleasant airs of the aristocracy that were now blowing on her. We may be sure that her new guest was not placed in the little room on the third storey, but had the very best bedroom in the house, and was made as comfortable as her personal superintendence down to the minutest particular could make him. She fluttered about him ; she flattered him to his face ; she be-praised him behind his back ; she ‘my-lorded’ him, and misquoted the “noble poet, Byron,” for him, fairly basking in his august presence, like a cat enjoying a hot July sun ; and she seemed to have kept in reserve for him all her life a whole treasury of far sweeter smiles than had ever been seen on her face before.

That prudent and worldly-wise man,

Jabez, took an early opportunity, when he was writing to his London lawyer, of making an inquiry or two about Lord Stainmore—it is so much pleasanter to know something about your visitors—and he heard in reply that the viscount was about thirty (Mrs. Oliphant said she was sure he did not look twenty-five), unmarried, the heir of a very old family possessed of large estates, which, however, were deeply mortgaged ; he was a captain in the army, where some strange tales were going about his temper when he served in foreign parts ; but the lawyer ventured to say that the tales in question were only such as could be told of any rich young fellow who was sowing his wild oats, and there was every reason to believe that Lord Stainmore was a clever and accomplished young nobleman, who could make himself very pleasant when he chose, and was likely to be a distinguished ornament, etc., etc.

The viscount, therefore, was well entertained at the Hall, and in return he did choose to be so very pleasant that he became a general favourite, talking religion with Dora, cynicism with Fothergill, horses with Harry, philanthropy with Jabez, and aristocracy with Mrs. Oliphant, till his visit at the Hall had gradually extended itself to a month. After the first two or three days, as was natural, he had given a little less of his time to Mr. Oliphant, and a little more to the ladies. Indeed, Fothergill bitterly, and the landlady of the Red Lion good-naturedly, declared that he must be looking after Kate.

“Mr. Oliphant, indeed! Marry come up,” Mrs. Grandilugs, the energetic mistress of pewter pots, remarked to her confidants; “I assure you the viscount cared little enough about him or his goings-on, though I told him about ’em all; but when I talked about her, and how rich and good

and pretty she is, he pricked his ears then, I can tell you. And it was after this he met Mr. Oliphant, as I tell you, and my opinion is that he'd never have troubled himself to go to the Hall at all if there had not been a handsome young lady there. Mark my words, Mrs. Brackenbottom, a marriage will come of it; and God bless her! say I; she deserves a good husband—nobody better."

The gossips all agreed with Mrs. Grandilugs. But if there was any such notion in Lord Stainmore's mind he kept it very well to himself; and as for Kate, the reader knows that she was already won.

Frank, who had gone to Italy, and was still in that country, kept up a tender and vigorous correspondence with Kate, though Mrs. Oliphant (she told her stepdaughter) had never found a good opportunity of acquainting Jabez with the engagement. She had sounded him once or twice, she

said, but had found him so strongly opposed to any *mésalliance* that she thought it would really be better to wait awhile. There could be no impropriety in the engagement remaining as it was, since she was aware of it; and she pledged herself to seize for the communication the very first favourable moment. Let Kate have confidence in her; what object in life could be more to her than the happiness of her dear, dear, dearest daughter?

But when things had gone on in this way for three or four weeks, Kate began to suspect her stepmother's hostility, and vehemently to regret that she had not allowed Frank, as he wished, to go boldly and demand her hand before he left. She was sorely perplexed and troubled. She could not meet that proud face of her old uncle—proud, yet always kind and smiling to herself—without feeling that she was guilty of deception which was quite foreign

to her nature. Every little act of kindness, every look of his, seemed now a reproach to her ; and many a time she longed, as she looked up in his face, to throw herself on his neck, and tell him all ; but she could not bring her maiden bashfulness to such an ordeal, and she felt that if he happened to regard her conduct as mean or ungrateful, such a thought from him would be more than she could bear. Of course Frank might write to him, but a letter would be a poor advocate. At last therefore Kate acquainted the artist with Mrs. Oliphant's suspicious conduct and her own uneasiness ; begging him, as the only honourable course open to them at present, to release her from the engagement. Her sole reasons for making such a request, she assured him, were those she stated ; there was not, nor would there ever be, the slightest change in her feelings towards him, and, if he liked, he might still con-

tinue his correspondence with her as a friend.

To this letter Frank replied good-humouredly as usual : he agreed with her that it was better their engagement should cease till he could speak in person to Mr. Oliphant ; but he trusted she would write to him as usual, and would still keep a little corner of her heart for one whose whole heart, whether she wished it or not, would be hers for ever.

Kate confided the general tenor of these letters to her stepmother, who, while affecting to reprove her for such a hasty step, as she called it, was really delighted at this result of her management. It only remained by degrees to blot out the remembrance of Frank from Kate's mind. For effecting this, Mrs. Oliphant had several resources which might not have occurred to a less fertile brain : one of them consisted in purloining from the letter-bag at least

half the letters which ought to have passed between Italy and the Hall ; for she expected in this way to make the two ‘friends’ begin to suspect each other’s constancy. Another plan, and one to which she trusted more, was to supplant Frank by a new lover.

After trying so long to bring Harry Highside to the point, she had almost ceased to give him any encouragement after Lord Stainmore’s arrival. This was natural enough ; for a viscount would be a much better match than a baronet—pleasanter in every way. But she was too sagacious to throw Harry overboard at once : the sun had risen, to be sure, but she was anxious to keep her moon in the sky still, though with diminished and feeble light, for fear his sun-ship should bethink himself to bolt back again before he had done his duty. So between the two, Mrs. Oliphant had some difficult finessing ; but

on the whole she played her cards pretty well.

The worst of it was, however, that Lord Stainmore seemed to care nothing about the game. He was pleasant to Kate, and that was all; on the other hand, he was so attentive to Dora, that he made Mrs. Oliphant at times, and in private, rather furious. Kate on her side admired the young nobleman (more perhaps than Frank would have liked, if he had known) for his great accomplishments. He never bragged or showed off; yet sooner or later it always appeared that he could beat any of the Reinsber people, Highside and Fothergill particularly, at their own weapons, or on any field they liked to mention.

One day Kate, Harry and Stainmore were riding out together, as they had often been before. The viscount, though he had brought a hunter with him to Reinsber, a splendid animal, had hitherto always been

content with a trot by Miss Oliphant's side along the road. Besides, he had often praised Harry's horsemanship in terms that showed how much better he considered it than his own ; a superiority which Kate and every one took for granted, Harry himself not least, for he was full of brag about his forte. This particular October day was remarkably fine, the air bracing, and the turf in capital condition. As the party trotted along the road, they reached a little eminence immediately below which there lay an extensive moor in full view. It was rough ground, crossed by two or three awkward walls and ditches ; but when Kate pulled in at the top of the hill to look at the view, his lordship said very modestly :

“It is a glorious day for a good gallop : what do you say to your showing me a little of your Yorkshire steeple-chasing, Mr.

Highside? It strikes me this would be rather a good place for it."

"And will you promise to follow?" asked Harry, rather too eagerly for such a polite proposal, and hoping to show Kate now which was the better man.

"Why, I'll not quite say that," answered the other, laughing; "you will probably be hard to follow. But I'll do my best; only do not give me anything too difficult."

"Oh, no; we'll just have a gallop, and a little leaping over yon walls, and round again by the stone man; and Miss Oliphant could stay with Foster and watch us."

Kate, therefore, remained on the road, looking at them as they rode off. At first they went quietly, but after a hundred yards or so, Harry called out, "Now come on," and struck his spurs into his horse. They were soon at full speed, Highside a little in advance, and after clearing the first

ditch, he glanced back to see how his rival took it. Stainmore, however, was across in an instant; so Harry rode for the nearest wall, with a twinkle in his eye. "He'll think twice before he takes that; it's a hardish leap, especially for a fellow that does not know this sort of thing." But Stainmore still kept alongside, and put his animal at the five-foot wall without hesitation, so that the two horses touched the ground on the other side at the same moment. Highside, in some surprise, looked at the viscount's face—it was smiling and perfectly undisturbed. "Hang it, he's a better rider than I fancied," he thought. Then there was another wide ditch, which they cleared together, and another wall, higher than the last, loomed up some three or four hundred yards away.

"Aim for the gate, Lord Stainmore; we can't do the wall—it's a six-footer, almost,"

exclaimed Harry, swerving aside towards the gate he mentioned.

“Is it, think you? Well, never mind, I think I’ll have a go at it—but you do as you like. I always ride straight myself on a spree like this—it is far more fun.” And Lord Stainmore held on his way, as straight as an arrow, for the fence.

Harry half turned his horse to accompany him, then thought better of the thing, and with a rather exulting, “Well, if he likes to break his neck, the fool, let him! I don’t intend to break mine, and there will be so much the more chance for me,” rode for the gate. He saw the other in the distance set himself at the wall, and get over somehow: “Ay, that’s all very well—a fine dissolving view on this side; but let us see how he looks on the other;” and he was soon over the gate, and looking out for his lordship on the grass under the wall.

No, he was not there. He was trotting along, fifty yards beyond the wall, safe and sound, and apparently as cool as if nothing remarkable had happened.

“He’s the devil himself!” cried Harry fiercely; “but I’ll go with him over the next wall if he goes to hell.” And clenching his teeth, he increased his speed till he was by the other’s side once more.

“They are rather stiff these walls of yours, Mr. Highside; I am not surprised at anybody’s declining them,” said Stainmore, seemingly inclined to enter into a little pleasant conversation: “I see there is another ahead—like the last, I take it?”

“Worse: by heaven, none but a madman would try it; but if you do, I will: it shall never be said Harry Highside was beaten on his own ground.”

“Oh, you’ll do it, I think, if you try.—Here we are!” And he lifted his hat to Miss Oliphant, who was now only about

fifty yards away, and was watching the race with great interest.

It was certainly magnificent to see the coolness of the man as, immediately afterwards, without moving a muscle of his face, or checking the speed of his horse at all, he pressed his knees into the saddle, and lifting the reins, rose with him at the enormous breast of solid stone in front. He seemed almost like one of the fabled centaurs—a part of his horse. And in a moment the noble animal was descending gracefully on the other side, safe and sound, though he had barely cleared the stones by a hair's breadth. The viscount then slackened his pace and rode up to Kate at an easy trot.

Harry was not so fortunate. In the first place he had blown his horse by galloping up to Lord Stainmore, and in the next, rather hoping than expecting to get safely over, he went at the fence full rush in a

state of dare-devil excitement, when the feat required greater judgment and a cooler head than he ever had in his life before. The consequence was a dull *thunge*—the scattering of half a dozen top-stones in as many directions—and the shooting of Harry himself head-foremost from the saddle, like a bolt from a cross-bow, into a treacherous muddy ditch that lay immediately below the wall. There he was speedily rejoined by his horse, which fell all on a heap and lay stunned by the shock. The fall, however, being a soft one, Harry soon picked himself up, and, though covered with mire from head to foot, found that none of his bones were broken. He then pulled his horse out of the ditch with a curse and a savage click of the bridle, and led him, limping, and as dirty as his master, to join the party.

Kate had received Lord Stainmore with a beautiful glance of admiration which

ought to have more than repaid him. For Harry, however, as soon as she saw he was uninjured, she had a sly humourous twinkle of the eyes and a contraction of the muscles about her mouth, which showed that she was only prevented by an extreme effort of politeness from bursting into a downright laugh at his discomfiture. His appearance, too, as he advanced looking thunder and lightning from beneath the coating of black mud which covered his face as well as his clothes, was certainly very ludicrous. The viscount noticed her inclination to laugh at Highside, and both then and ever afterwards was pointedly kind and courteous to him.

“I hope you are all right, Highside,” he said; “it was a silly thing of us to try it, and the merest chance whether of us got over safely.”

Harry was much crest-fallen, yet boiling over with jealousy and anger.

“If ever you want to part with that horse of yours, Lord Stainmore,” he said, sulkily, “I’ll buy him at your own price.”

“Not on sale nor likely to be,” answered the other, laughing, and patting Saladin’s neck ; “ I do not part with my best friends so easily. He certainly is a wonderful horse for leaping and would carry a fellow over almost anything. I always thought that animal of yours a bit too low in the fore-quarters for a perfect hunter.”

“ Well, we will see some other day. We will have another race any time you like to name. I don’t like to hold myself beaten, confound it, because my horse has made such a mess of it.”

“ And you have no reason, Highside,” said the viscount ; “ the best jockey in the world, if he is not well horsed, cannot help being unlucky sometimes. If you had been on Saladin here, I am certain you would have come in an easy first, and I confess

I have not pluck enough to try you again."

Harry was somewhat appeased at the other's humility in his hour of triumph, and Kate could not help admiring Stainmore again for his generosity in assigning the merit of the victory entirely to Saladin. But she had her own opinion, which she kept to herself, on the relative merits of the horsemanship displayed on the occasion, and that opinion was not in favour of Mr. Highside. As they rode home, too, after horse and man had been duly scraped and wiped down by the groom, she wondered much whether her own previous eulogies of Harry's riding had been in any degree the cause of Lord Stainmore's bringing on a contest which ended so unexpectedly. It was a mere question of curiosity, no doubt, and the viscount's demeanour afterwards gave no answer to it. He was still soft-spoken (to her and everyone, always

soft-spoken), interesting, pleasant; but he made no nearer advances, and never once mentioned the race again to anyone.

CHAPTER III.

LORD STAINMORE GOES TO ITALY.

IT was Lord Stainmore, then, who disturbed by his entrance the family conclave which was discussing Mr. Oliphant's intentions with regard to Wideawake. Jabez, rather hard pressed by Kate, gladly availed himself of the interruption to change the subject, and, as the young nobleman was so much interested in philanthropy, promised him the pleasure of a visit in the morning to several cottages in the village, and especially to that of Mrs. Tennant.

"She is a poor bed-ridden old woman," he explained, as he started next day with the viscount, "to whom I demonstrated a

year ago the advantage in point of economy of getting her tea, amongst other things, at wholesale prices. In fact, I offered to procure it for her in this way, and give her the money so saved at the year-end. I am now taking her the proceeds, and I fancy she will be very grateful." The face of the universal philanthropist beamed with kindly smiles as he spoke.

"You work hard and well, Mr. Oliphant," replied his companion, "I cannot tell you how much good your noble example does me."

"Well, how are you to-day, Mrs. Tenant?" said Jabez, as they entered the little cottage.

"Why, middling, nobbut middling, thank ye kindly, Mr. Oliphant. If ought wad do me ony good it's the sight o' yersel—ye're good for sair een, that ye are. But t' rheumatis is varra bad this morning," she continued in a whining voice; "if it 'ud

nobbut confine itsel to yan spot, I wadn't care, but it's aw up my back an' i' my showders an' legs. Oh dear, I wor saying to Mr. Truman, only a week sin' come to-morrow, if it was the Lord's will I'd be fain to gang to Him."

"A very proper reflection indeed, but I hope you will be better soon; I have brought Viscount Stainmore to see you."

"It's like yersel to do it, Mr. Oliphant; an' to tell truth, I wor rayther expecting him, for there wor a thief i' t' candle last neght."

The viscount stared a little, till he was informed by Mr. Oliphant that she meant a sort of excrescence which was considered a sign of the probable arrival of a stranger.

"You remember that it is a year since you began buying your tea at wholesale prices, Mrs. Tennant?"

Mrs. Tennant perfectly remembered the fact, and had been indulging in great ex-

pectations as to the result. In truth, she had been quite as exact as Mr. Oliphant, and had calculated the year to a day. Of course she could not tell how much money she would have to receive, but she looked on it as so much capital safe in the bank, and had reflected long and deeply on the most satisfactory way of spending it when it came to hand. Many little luxuries had figured agreeably in the prospect — chief amongst which was a quart of gin, a liquor that, contrary to the doctor's opinion, she affirmed to be the best medicine for her complaint. She thought it well, however, to conceal her previous ruminations, and, not knowing exactly what answer was expected from her, gave a prudent and cautious one.

“No, is it now? Dear me, how time does git on! To think that a poor sinful creatur like me should have been spared another year!”

“Yes, it is the year-end this morning, and I have brought you the proceeds of your prudence and economy,” said Mr. Oliphant. “You will find the amount, I think, much more than you expected, and I hope you will tell your neighbours, that they may go and do likewise.”

“Surely, surely, for that’s Scripture truth, isn’t it?—Eh, but ye are kind, Mr. Oliphant,” answered Peggy, looking up at him with greedy eyes.

“I find, by an exact reckoning, that what you have to receive is no less than six shillings and threepence halfpenny.”

“Ye don’t say so! The Lord—the Lord be praised!” exclaimed the old woman in unfeigned delight. The amount was at least twice as much as she had counted on, and visions of two bottles of gin instead of one (to say nothing of the odd pence, which would be very nice too) floated before her eyes. “Oh, *won’t* I tell aw t’ village what ye hev done for me!”

Jabez enjoyed her satisfaction for a few moments in silence : then he went on—

“ Yes, it is very gratifying, and I think it will be an encouragement to you to proceed in the same course. — Here is the result” (he put a paper package on the little table) ; “ I have bought you some good books, and a number of nice tracts, with the money.”

Tracts instead of gin !—would it not have made a saint angry ? At all events, Mrs. Tennant, who was no saint, was furious : and gratitude (a lively expectation, that is, of future soups and puddings), Christian charity, nay, prudence itself were all swept away from her mind for the instant.

“ Tracts, indeed !—did ye say tracts ?” she exclaimed, in a voice whose rough vigour startled her two listeners by its contrast to her previous feeble tones.

“ Yes, Mrs. Tennant,” answered Jabez,

looking at her with benignant surprise, "I selected them, I assure you, with great care; and they will furnish you with very nice, good reading, during the long winter evenings."

"And what right had ye to gang spending *my* money for me? Tracts, indeed!—Marry come up, as if I wor rich enough to lay out my bit o' brass i' sic trash as thor!" waving her hand scornfully at the table.

Jabez was utterly taken aback by her way of looking at the matter and by her violence, while Stainmore hid his face behind his white pocket-handkerchief to prevent an explosion of laughter.

"Trash, Mrs. Tennant!" said Mr. Oliphant, recovering some of his dignity, and in a severe, haughty tone. "I am sorry you do not like the way in which I have laid out your money; but I should have thought the obligations you are under to my family and myself would have kept you

from being insolent—especially after all my trouble. I wish you good-morning. Really—trash! You are very ungrateful.—Come, Lord Stainmore. Trash, forsooth!” and Jabez took up his hat and walked out in a huff. The viscount followed, first flinging the old woman half-a-crown, as he would have done to a beggar.

“The ingratitude of the poor is amazing sometimes, my lord,” said Jabez, in a melancholy tone, as they walked away from the door.

“The exhibition of it we have just seen is certainly as—as—tonishing,” replied the other, again vigorously blowing his nose. “You have indeed much to contend with, but it gives me great pleasure to be an eye-witness of your noble efforts in the good cause.”

“What a woman is that! What duplicity has been hidden beneath her mask of religion!”

“ And how well she must have contrived to wear the mask, to escape your penetration, Mr. Oliphant !”

In the other houses, our philanthropists escaped without any misfortune such as had attended them at Peggy’s, and the viscount expressed himself much gratified with all he saw. He did not visit more than two or three of the cottages, however, before, much to his regret, he was under the necessity of returning to the Hall to write some letters. He left Jabez accordingly, and on re-entering the drawing-room, found Mrs. Oliphant there by herself. It was an opportunity which he had sought for some days.

“ I have been visiting some of the poorer people in Reinsber, with Mr. Oliphant ; it was really a most interesting experience,” he said.

“ One of which you would soon grow

tired, Lord Stainmore, benevolent as you are," she replied.

"Probably I might : we had certainly one extremely painful case of ingratitude. Mr. Oliphant gave an old hag, called Tenant or something, a package of excellent books, and she actually flew into a passion because she had not something else. I often think the minds of the lower orders are much worse regulated than those of persons in our station, Mrs. Oliphant."

"I quite agree with your lordship," she answered, much gratified at his coupling her rank with his own.

"By the bye, do you ever hear anything of the Astons now?"

The smile vanished suddenly from Mrs. Oliphant's face. The dreadful fact was that, sixteen or seventeen years before, she had lived as lady's-maid in that family, and had been afterwards sent by Miss Aston, who had taken a fancy to her, to be edu-

cated as a governess. It was when serving in the latter capacity that she met with John Oliphant, who married her without dreaming that she had ever filled a lower station ; not that it would have made any difference with the honest-hearted fellow if he had known ; but she never told him, or Kate, or Jabez ; and, as she had now dropped her older friends, she fondly hoped that all remembrance of the fact had died out. It was not a very formidable skeleton perhaps to one of the well-regulated minds about which his lordship had just been speaking ; but she considered it by far the worst in her closet.

The other was watching her with a keen, pitiless eye, that read every thought in her breast as she gasped out—

“ No—that is, no—my lord, never.”

“ Of course you are aware that Miss Aston married Lord Hardie ?”

“ Ye-es, they did me the honour to send

me cards.—You have heard Lady Hardie speak of me, perhaps ?” she continued quickly, with a gleam of hope.

“ I cannot say I have, for I never had much talk with her of late years. But I never forget a face, and, the moment I met you here, I remembered that I had seen you at the Astons’ when I used to go there as a boy—dear me, how many years ago is it ?”

“ Ah, I hardly dare count, my lord ;—it is so long since,” she added, with an appealing look, “ that one forgets to recur to the time even in one’s own family.”

He understood her perfectly, and said, with a smile—

“ Oh, Mr. and Miss Oliphant have no doubt many newer associations of their own, and would scarcely care about your old friends, however dear they may be to yourself.”

“ This is a polite way of showing me I am in his power,” thought Mrs. Oliphant. “ What does he want from me ?”

“ Well, to change the subject to a more important one to myself,” he resumed, “ what would you say if I ask Miss Oliphant to be Lady Stainmore ?”

Mrs. Oliphant’s face brightened. If this was all, she was ready enough, heaven knows, to help him without any pressure.

“ Really, Lord Stainmore—you take one so by surprise. I had no notion of this,” she replied with sufficient delight in her tone ; “ but so far as I am concerned, I can only say that I should consider such a match a very great honour to us.”

“ Thank you, Mrs. Oliphant ; I felt somehow from the first that I might count on you—one has a sort of instinctive knowledge of friends and enemies in matters on which one sets one’s heart. But besides your sanction, for which I can assure you I am very grateful, I want a little help from you, if you would be so kind.”

“ Help in what way, my lord ?”

“ Well, I have observed Miss Oliphant rather attentively, as under the circumstances you will imagine ; and I may say without vanity that, though she is no ordinary girl, I think I should succeed in my addresses if she has formed no prior attachment. But what I have seen of her leads me to believe she has. Am I right ?”

“ I—I fear you are.”

“ You fear it ! Then it is some one, I suppose, of whom you disapprove ? It is certainly not Highside—she laughs at him ; nor Fothergill, for whom she has too open a friendship to lead to anything further. May I venture to ask who it is ?—You very properly hesitate to answer such a question ; but shall I help you with a guess ?—is it the young artist of whom I have heard so much ?” And little by little he forced her to explain exactly how the matter stood, including Kate’s letter to Holden and the

artist's reply, which broke off the affair for the present.

"So you see, my lord," she continued, "there is no actual engagement now, and nothing to prevent your speaking to her."

"You will excuse my differing from you on this one point, Mrs. Oliphant: but if I understand your daughter's character she will be perfectly faithful till Holden acquaints Mr. Oliphant; and there is not much fear of the painter turning inconstant while there's a chance left, poor devil!—begging your pardon for the word."

"No, no; I agree with you there thoroughly—the viper! Then do you mean to proceed no further with your own suit?"

"Ah, I do not say that: I do not give up my wishes quite so easily. But it is one of my maxims, as a man of the world, not to start my horses till the course is clear. And till then, if I know Miss Oli-

phant at all, there is not even a chance of the ribbon."

"You mean——"

"I mean only, my dear Mrs. Oliphant, that if anything should unfortunately happen to Mr. Holden" (there was a sinister flash of the black eyes, which made Mrs. Oliphant shudder, she could hardly tell why), "or if he were ass enough to fall in love with some one else——"

"Impossible, Lord Stainmore ! Insolent as he is, the young man would never dare to do it."

"No, I do not expect that ; but many things may happen, and then I should come forward—I hope after a time with a fair chance."

"Well, perhaps I ought scarcely to say as much to you, but I shall leave no stone unturned to break off this unhappy affair ; and you may be quite sure whose cause I shall then advocate."

“Thank you very much,” answered the other, but rather carelessly, as if the promise were no more than he expected: “I must go south in a day or two.”

“So soon, my lord?”

“I have had a very pleasant and a long visit, but I have some business to do before I start for the Continent. I think of spending two or three months in Italy this winter.”

What suspicion was it that flashed across Mrs. Oliphant’s mind at the name, and that made her so pale? What he said, he said in the pleasantest and most kindly voice in the world.

“Oh, and—and as we have now a common interest in the matter, perhaps you would let me know from time to time where this young fellow is? It is just possible we might happen to be in the same place at the same time, and, if so, I should very

much like to see this victorious Paladin of the brush."

"I will let you know, my lord," she said, in a faint, low voice ; and he turned the conversation to other topics.

A day or two afterwards he took his leave, with many thanks to Mr. Oliphant, both for his hospitality and his valuable hints on the proper management of estates. He was accompanied by numerous regrets, from Kate included, who was delighted however that some one lately at Reinsber might possibly see her dear Frank in Italy. Lord Stainmore seemed a most agreeable link of communication between the two places.

CHAPTER IV.

DICK WIDEAWAKE IN COURT.

ON the morning of the day appointed for the hearing of the important case, *Oliphant v. Wideawake*, the court-house at Stainton was crowded to suffocation ; for Dick was very popular, and it was generally thought that Mr. Oliphant should not have gone the length of bringing him into a court of justice for such trivial offences. The farmer, accompanied by his silent friend, Hawthornthwaite, appeared early on the stage, and, till the bench was occupied by Mr. Carlton and another magistrate, spent the time in returning with interest the ‘chaff’ of his numerous

friends. Jabez came later, escorted by his lawyer, Mr. Crumplins.

The Acts under which the farmer was charged were passed in the reign of George IV. for the better regulation of turnpike roads. It was there enacted, not unreasonably, that the driver of a waggon, wain, cart, or other carriage should not ride upon his vehicle on any turnpike road without having either reins or some one on foot to lead the horse; and further that no cart should be driven along such a road without there being painted "in one or more straight line or lines, upon some conspicuous part of the right or off-side of the vehicle or upon the off-side shafts thereof," the name and abode of the owner, "at full length, in large legible letters, not less than one inch in height." The driver who offended against either of these regulations was liable to a fine of forty shillings if he were not the owner, of five pounds if he were;

and in either case to three months' imprisonment in default of payment.

When the indictment had been read, charging Dick with driving without reins or a name on his cart, Mr. Crumplins rose, with a bow to their worships, and said he appeared for the plaintiff.

"And who is for the defendant?" asked Mr. Carlton.

"I'se here for mysel, to be sure," replied Dick, "ye don't think I've ony brass to ware o' lawyers, do ye, Mr. Carlton?"

Mr. Crumplins, a pert young attorney, who thoroughly believed in the (lawyer's) axiom that the man who pleads his own cause has a fool for his client, was promising himself no little sport at the expense of the burly farmer, and said rather jeeringly, "Come, come, Mr. Wideawake, it is very hard that you don't give the profession a job sometimes: you make plenty of money by old horses, *I* know."

“Eigh,” answered Dick, “but that’s nae reason ’at yan sud spend it o’ young asses.”

Amid the laughter which followed this retort, Mr. Crumplins opened the case. He said he would not detain their worships long, for he apprehended the offences against the Act would be so clearly proved by the respectable witnesses he should call that, when these had given their evidence, no shadow of doubt would remain on their worships’ minds. Driving without reins, in particular, was an offence so grave that no one could be surprised if a wise legislature had attached a severe penalty to it; for though it might be said, that in this especial case, no harm had resulted therefrom, what, he might ask, would be the consequence if persons were allowed to urge horses which they had no means of controlling, through the streets of a crowded town? Mr. Oliphant’s motives in bringing this action were the purest possible, for he

felt that such an evil must be stopped, as it were, at the fountain-head, otherwise there would be no resisting it. Hence, in spite of the ill-will he would necessarily incur, in spite even of a strong personal liking for the defendant himself, who was a very respectable man and therefore the more to be blamed for his breach of the Act, the plaintiff had come forward to vindicate the laws of his country. Mr. Crumplins would now call Mr. Oliphant himself to prove the facts of the case.

Jabez accordingly, having been sworn, stated in answer to the lawyer's questions, that on the day named, he was walking with Mr. Truman, when they met the two farmers both sitting on the front of a cart, Wideawake acting as driver, but having no reins; and further that there was no name on the off-side or the off-side shaft of the cart; that, observing this, he had informed Wideawake of his intention to prosecute

him, whereupon the farmer had become angry.

“What wor t’ cart laden wi’, Mr. Oliphant?” asked Dick.

“With sacks, some full of hay or corn apparently, and some empty.”

“An’ wor naan o’ t’ empty secks hanging out a bit ower t’ off-side?”

“I do not know.”

Dick’s eye twinkled with satisfaction; but Mr. Oliphant was not yet aware of the gravity of the admission he had made.

“Ye swear there was no name; now did ye look near t’ back o’ t’ cart?”

“Not particularly.”

“Well, now, that’s honest—though ye’re rayther too mich given to looking at yan bit of a thing all’ays, Mr. Oliphant.”

“I saw no name, and I was convinced there was none, by your manner, your not denying the fact when I charged you with it.”

“An’ yet ye swear I wor varra angry?”

“Insolently angry, sir.”

“D’ye think then ’at a chap, when he’s insolently angry at being unjustly charged as he thinks, wad tak t’ trouble to set ye reght? Wad ye do it yersel?”

“I do not know.”

“No, but I knaw—an’ t’ court knaws, too,—’at nae man wad do it. He wad just say, Let t’ owd fool think what he likes” [laughter]; “he’s wrang but I don’t care.—Now will ye gang out into t’ court-yard and look at t’ horse an’ cart there, an’ tell us on yer aith whether they’re t’ same?”

Mr. Oliphant went out accordingly, and returned considerably astonished and crest-fallen.

“Well, are they t’ same, Mr. Oliphant?” asked the farmer.

“I believe so.”

“An’ did ye see ony name on t’ off-side, now ’at ye hev looked better, an’ at aw on’t?”

“There is certainly your name, but it is in a most unusual place ;—it is close to the back of the cart instead of the front.”

“Now then, Mr. Oliphant,” said Dick in his most decisive voice, “ye couldn’t swear ’at ye looked at that place particularly, an’ ye couldn’t swear ’at there wor nae secks hanging ower t’ cart-side. Be varra careful now : will ye still swear ’at t’ name wor not there efter aw, hidden under a bit of a corn-seck ?”

“I certainly cannot now swear that positively, though——”

“Varra weel, that’ll do ; and ye may stand down, for me.”

Mr. Crumplins, astounded like Mr. Oliphant at the discovery of the name on the cart after all, was beating his brains to find some way out of the dilemma in which Dick’s arguments had placed the case. He had measured the letters, but they were of more than the required height and con-

formed to the Act in every way; to be sure they were in a most unusual place, as Mr. Oliphant said, but then they were on the off-side, and conspicuous enough, which was all apparently that the law required. Was it possible that his client could really have been mistaken? The lawyer could think of no other explanation unless Dick had got the name painted there afterwards; yet the paint seemed old enough. He contented himself therefore with asking his client whether he had ever seen a name on a vehicle before in such a position.

“Certainly not,” said Jabez.

“And don’t you think it may have been painted there since?”

“Nay now, Mr. Crumplins,” exclaimed Dick, appealing to the bench, “we’ve nought to do wi’ his thowts; we want facts. If ye can prove ’at t’ name hes been painted sin’ he met us, prove it and welcome: but ye cannot, nae mair than ye can

prove that iver a lawyer went to heaven!" [Laughter.] The justices of course decided with the farmer, and would not allow the question to be put.

Mr. Truman's examination did not take long: he testified to the same facts as Mr. Oliphant, but, as he had noticed the cart less, he declined, still more decidedly than that gentleman, to swear that the name was not on it at the time in its present place. He stated however that Dick, besides sitting in the driver's place, had addressed the horse as Jerry, saying, "Gee up, Jerry."

The last witness called was Hawthornthwaite: for the prosecution, though they well knew that he was friendly to Dick, had thought it best to summon him. He took the book slowly and kissed it gingerly.

"Your name is James Hawthornthwaite," said Crumplins.

“ Well—that’s my name—nae doubt,” replied the witness, after a cautious pause.

“ And you are a farmer ?”

“ Ay, I farm a bit.”

“ You were with Wideawake when he met Mr. Oliphant ?”

“ Ye’ve heard what they said.”

“ Yes, sir, but we can have no evasions. We want to hear what you say.”

“ I’ve happen be bearing testimony again’ mysel.”

“ Nobody wants to prosecute you, you simpleton !” said Crumplins impatiently, “ and you must speak the truth.”

“ Well then, we wor riding together.”

“ Oh, riding together—you admit that. And Wideawake was sitting in the driver’s place ?”

“ I isn’t reghtly sure : yan can’t remember sich trifles quite as weel as rent-day.”

“ Well, it does not matter, as we have his position from other witnesses, but I ad-

vise you not to prevaricate farther with the court. Now as to this name, was it on the cart on the day in question ?”

“ Ay, on t’ day i’ question.”

“ You will swear that you saw the name yourself, and that it has not been painted since ?” said Crumplins, in surprise.

“ I swear that.”

“ Then will you tell the court why you remember this trifle when you forgot another circumstance equally trifling ?”

The question was a silly one as addressed to a hostile witness, and the answer was ready.

“ Why it wor natteral, ye knaw, efter what had happened, to look if there wor ony name.”

“ Hm—well, there’s no getting the truth out of you, I see : I have done with you.”

Dick jumped up: “ Whose horse wor it, Mr. Hawthornthwaite ?”

“ Mine,” answered the witness, readily.

“An’ we hed to come down Reinsber Brow, that day, hedn’t we?”

“Ay.”

“Well, now, ye knaw a bit about horse-flesh; wad ye trust a stranger to yer horse to drive him down t’ Brow?”

“Nay, naan so.”

“An’ wad ye drive another man’s horse down, yersel, wi’out reins?”

“I might—if I wor weel paid for it.”

“But if not?”

“Why then I wadn’t: I’ve a wife an’ five childer, ye see.”

Dick, then, being prudently determined to have the last word, said he should call no witnesses for the defence, and in a little speech gave reins to his indignation against Mr. Oliphant.

“Mr. Crumplins,” he began, “said at first he would nobbut mak a short speech, an’ it wor a short un, your worships—it wor as short as Dick’s hat-band ’at went

nine times round an' wadn't tee" [laughter]. "It willn't tee—nohow! What are t' facts o' t' case? Why, here's a chap comes down to Reinsber fra Lunnon, 'at hes med a big lump o' brass by selling tea; sa Owd King Congo" [roars of laughter] "wants to order aw t' dalesmen about as if they wor his shop-lads, an' to mak 'em paint their names o' their carts just where he likes, i' big gowd letters sich as he used to see on t' tea-chests—'Oliphant and Co.' Well, Owd King Congo's a grand fellow, I mak na doubt—an' he knaws how to treat his friends—but we willn't be trampled on for aw that, down i' Yorkshire here."

"Really, your worships, I must protest against such language with regard to my client," interrupted the lawyer.

"*In* coorse ye protest, Mr. Crumplins," retorted Dick;—"ye're paid to protest. Howiver, ye've heard, yer worships, 'at Mr. Oliphant and Mr. Truman willn't swear t' name wor not on t' off-side o' t' cart on that

day, efter aw, an' James Hawthornthwaite swears, and I'd swear it mysel' if ye'd let me, 'at it wor there. Sae there's an end, I sud think, about t' name.—Then they say I wor t' driver, acos I wor sitting i' t' driver's place and cawed t' horse Jerry. But if we hedn't reins, why, t' driver might manage t' horse just as weel whichiver side he sat at. Of course, I knew t' name o' t' tit, an' may hev spokken to him as Jerry—it wad be a rum go, an' me sa mich amang horses, if I didn't knaw what my nebbor's horse wor cawed; ay, it wad, I think! But wad Mr. Oliphant hisselt drive a strange horse down sich a hill as Reinsber Brow? Begow, I sud like to see him do it, reght weel, efter this!" [Laughter.] "Nay, if ony body wor driving, it wor James—but he worn't driving, nauther; sa they needn't bring ony actions again' him; for I'd nobbut just given him a lift on my cart, an' he wor letting me hev a ride aback of his horse—so that we wor nauther of

us driving, but least of aw mysel" [laughter]. "An' as to yan's not telling Owd King Congo how it wor, when he com up to us as big as bull beef, an' looking as if he'd swallowed a rattlesnake, an' it didn't agree wi' him" [laughter], "why, d'ye think it likely yan wad, when yan wor aw i' a passion at being sa badly used—after he'd pretended to be a friend to yan an' aw that? Dal it, we aren't as chicken-hearted as that comes to:—he mun gang to his shop-boys for that! An' now I've done, gentlemen, an' if ye fine me efter what ye've heard, I'se be surprised, that's aw."

The two magistrates, after deliberating for some time, were either so much puzzled by Dick's sophistries, or so much swayed by predilection in his favour (such things occasionally turn the scale of justice in the country) that they found it was uncertain whether of the two men was the driver, whilst there was one witness to swear that

the name was upon the cart on the day in question, and none to swear absolutely that it was not. They dismissed the case, therefore, amidst great applause ; and Dick left the court in triumph—delighted at having beaten the lawyer, and still more at having fixed on Mr. Oliphant a nickname which he was sure would stick. Jabez himself retired in high dudgeon, disgusted at the farmer's insolence and the whole of the proceedings.

Connected with the case, however, there were one or two secrets which Crumplins was not sharp enough to find out, and which Dick prudently kept to himself for a long time. The name was not really on the cart when the two farmers encountered Mr. Oliphant on the road. Its not being there was a pure accident, for the painter had not been able to attend when Dick wished him to come and put the name on, of course in the usual place ; still it was

not there. But when the farmer got back to Sandy Topping, aware of the prosecution impending over him, and also, with true Yorkshire obstinacy, determined not to be beaten, he cut the name out of another old cart which he had, and ingeniously spliced this into the place on the new cart where Mr. Oliphant saw it afterwards so much to his surprise. Dick was a tolerable carpenter, and the piecing was so neatly done on the outside that it would have escaped much quicker eyes than those of little Crumplins ; while a long veneer of old wood placed over the work on the inside of the cart made a detection of the trick almost impossible in that quarter also. As all this was done the same night and in the presence of Hawthornthwaite, the latter committed no perjury in swearing, as he did, that he had seen the name on the cart that very day. If Crumplins had suspected the trick, he would have

asked James if the name was there when he met Mr. Oliphant, and of course the farmer would have been forced to say no.

Jerry, the horse, was really the property of Hawthornthwaite at the time, but had been sold to him by Dick only a few days before. Of the two men, therefore, Wideawake was much the better acquainted with the animal, a circumstance which might perhaps have accounted, still more naturally than the explanations given in court, for his using the horse's name and even for his sitting in the driver's place during the perilous descent of Reinsber Brow.

CHAPTER V.

LETTERS FROM ITALY.

“Naples, November 25, 186—.

“**D**EAR MR. OLIPHANT,—I am writing a hasty line to ask how you all are. I have been here only three days, and am rather tired of Naples already; but then the city is an old acquaintance of mine. I wish, though, that Mrs. and Miss Oliphant were here to see the colouring of the bay and mountain just now. As for yourself, I fancy your philanthropic efforts have so endeared Reinsber to you that you prefer the sight of your own little village to the grandest view in the world. Ah, I have not yet arrived at such

a pitch either of patriotism or benevolence ; but on my return to England I hope, aided by your advice and encouraged by your example, to do some little good in my generation by following the same path as yourself.

“There are very few English here. Please tell Mrs. Oliphant I met her friends, Lady Cleaborough and her daughter the other day, and they were glad to hear the latest news of her. They were delighted with the accounts I gave them of your Yorkshire Arcadia, but I think what astonished them most was my description of the ingratitude of that horrible old woman Tennant, whom we visited together. They could hardly believe that such viciousness and hypocrisy existed in human nature.

“I also saw an old friend of yours, to-day—Mr. Holden, who was staying with you some time since. Hearing he was in the neighbourhood, I made an excursion to

find him—got tidings of him at last in a small village where he is lodging, some eight or ten miles from Naples—and then unearthed him where he was hard at work on a magnificent painting, which I have bespoken for myself, of the Bay. He was humming a tune as I came up, and seems all right and very happy. What a noble, straightforward young fellow he is! To tell the truth, I am charmed with him, and promise myself both many future visits to his romantic open-air studio and the pleasure moreover of his friendship in England. I think I was most of all pleased with his modesty when I spoke of that wonderfully heroic action of his, which you have all only too good cause to remember. Most men would plume themselves on such a feat, as they might very justly; but he ascribes the result entirely to ‘good luck,’ and thinks anybody else would have done the same thing! Well, I know one man

who is of opinion, after seeing the place, that he would not have liked to take the jump ;—so I hope Miss Oliphant will not fall in again unless she has some better help at hand than mine.

“ There is much here, in the streets and everywhere, that would make our sarcastic friend, Fothergill, smile ; and the glorious Italian cathedrals with their old stained glass and pealing music would delight Miss Mansfield. Of all my Reinsber friends Harry Highside alone would be out of place, for there is no grouse-shooting, not a wall to break his neck over, and scarcely a decent cob to ride.

“ Believe me, with very kind regards to all,

“ Yours most truly,

“ STAINMORE.

“ P.S. If you write, direct to me as Signor Smythe, Poste Restante. I think I told you that I am travelling *incognito*.”

The artist also expressed his opinion of the viscount in a letter to Kate :

“ Lord Stainmore came up to me the other day whilst I was painting, and of course I was very glad to see any friend of yours, and it was kind of him to take the trouble. He gave me a commission for the picture I am at work on now—to encourage me, I suppose ; but I do not altogether like the man. There is too much oil and ‘ flarch ’ and flummery about him for me ; he is too bland, soft, and silky. In one word, I don’t believe in him, though I do not often take decided dislikes at first sight. However, thank heaven, the world is large enough for us both, and a great lord and a humble landscape-spoiler are not likely to come across each other much.”

CHAPTER VI.

MORE LETTERS.

“ Naples, Dec. 5, 186—.

“**D**EAR MR. OLIPHANT,—You will be surprised at receiving another letter from me so soon, but your surprise will cease when I tell you the melancholy cause. I must ask you to prepare yourselves for news which will be a sad shock to you all. Alas, I have great reason to fear that our noble and chivalrous young friend, Holden, is no more !

“ I told you how earnestly I wished to see more of him. I rode over to his village to-day for that purpose ; but when I knocked and inquired for him, the young woman who opened the door said with a startled

look and wiping her eyes, ‘ Ah, signor !’ ‘ What is the matter ?’ said I. Then with abundance of gesticulation and considerable feeling she told me that he had not been seen since yesterday morning, when he went as usual to his painting near the ruins ; but that at night his portmanteau was taken away by a stranger who came with the message that ‘ the Englishman wanted it.’ They let it go therefore without inquiry, but will be able, they say, to recognise the man. Nor after this did they think much about Mr. Holden failing to make his appearance at his usual hour, or even about his staying away for the night, though they own he had never done such a thing before. The woman says they fancied he had gone to see some friend, and had sent for the portmanteau with the intention of remaining all night. I blame them for their stupidity ; for surely in that case his message would have conveyed some hint of

his purpose. But what can you expect from these Italians? They are quite content, whatever becomes of yourself, if you only pay what you owe them.

“The people at the house, then, made no inquiries after Mr. Holden last night—as, if I am not carried away by my feelings, I am strongly of opinion they ought to have done—and it was not till about an hour before I arrived that they began to be alarmed about him. Then a peasant came in and told them he had happened to pass the spot where the artist usually painted. There he had seen the poor fellow’s easel lying on the grass, his palette and paints scattered about in the wildest disorder, and the picture itself with a great slash across it. He thought, too, there was a patch of blood on the ground. Of course, on this, Holden’s landlady sent for the police, and they were then, she said, investigating the matter at the ruins.

“I rode there immediately, and found several policemen, with a crowd of villagers, employed in searching the adjacent wood. Under the circumstances, my English face was an immediate passport to the favour of the superintendent, who gave me all the information he could. It was little beyond what I had already gleaned, except that his subordinates had failed as yet to find any trace or hear any tidings whatever of Holden himself. They thought, however, that the grass about the place where the poor fellow must have been sitting at his work appeared much trodden, just as though a desperate struggle had taken place there. The red patch, too, which the countryman had mentioned, was certainly, as I satisfied myself by a close examination, human blood. We sought for our poor friend high and low, and made inquiries about him everywhere till nightfall, without the slightest success: and I am only just returned,

leaving the rest still hard at work with torches.

“ The superintendent, who is a very gentlemanly, intelligent man, fears the worst. He argues from the cut picture, the broken easel, the red patch, and Holden’s continued absence, that a foul and brutal murder has been committed. Englishmen, he says, are always thought rich, and there are many brigands about—some have actually been heard of lately in this neighbourhood. And there is the sea close by, ominously suggestive, as he says ; for what dark deed may not its waters hide ? But for my part I still hope—I cannot, I will not, give up hoping, even against hope. May not Mr. Holden have left his picture at the ruins, thinking no one would see or harm it, whereas some mischievous boys have come by and cut it to pieces for a freak whilst he himself, entirely ignorant of all the hubbub at present going on about him, is quietly

staying with some acquaintance? To be sure, the superintendent, when I mentioned my solution to him, shook his head and pointed to the patch of blood—and he sickened me with the sight, I confess. I attach some importance, however, to the fact that the portmanteau was alleged to be sent for by our friend's orders; but the Italian thinks this was only a ruse of the brigands to get possession of more booty.

“How all this harrows me, you may imagine. I shall ride over to-morrow, of course, with daylight, and you may depend on my doing everything that money or time or unbounded zeal can do, to clear up this terrible mystery. I shall apply to the Government direct—good God, what a thing it is that an innocent Englishman cannot pursue his ennobling and glorious art without being exposed to dangers like these! Meanwhile, you may rest assured that if the slightest thing turns up to throw

any new light on the matter I will let you know instantly, and that I shall not rest night or day or leave a stone unturned till I have bottomed the tragedy, if it be one.

“Would to heaven I had pleasanter news for you! Please give my kindest regards and sympathies to Mrs. and Miss Oliphant—I know how anxious they will be about him. Believe me, my dear Mr. Oliphant,

“Most truly yours,

“STAINMORE.”

Kate fortunately was not in the room when Jabez read the letter to Mrs. Oliphant. The latter, though not concerned for Frank himself, listened awe-struck. Lord Stainmore's soft words but vindictive look as he spoke of Holden to her before he left—his going to Italy apparently on his track—and the singular coincidence of the supposed murder happening soon after they met—all this, joined to so much protesta-

tion of friendship for a rival, made her heart, unscrupulous and deceitful as she was, literally stand still with suspicions she durst not name. The small villain was face to face with the great one and recoiled from him, as the traveller on the Brocken shrinks from his own exaggerated image.

“It is a very sad affair,” said Jabez, when he had done. “Poor fellow, he was worthy of a better fate !”

“Then you—really think he is—dead ?” muttered Mrs. Oliphant.

“I am afraid the news unnerves you a good deal, Mrs. Oliphant ;—we were indeed deeply indebted to him, but we must try to bear these losses with dignity. Well, I really do not see what other conclusion one can form. However, Lord Stainmore himself still hopes,” he continued with a confidence he did not feel.

“Yes,” answered Mrs. Oliphant as before.

“His lordship’s letter is a very proper and a very kind one under the circumstances,” remarked the other.

“Hm—m—oh, yes.”

“I wonder whether it would do any good to write to Her Majesty’s representatives at Naples. I am most anxious that at all events no money or pains should be spared ; and perhaps the offer of a large reward might be of service. But no doubt Lord Stainmore will do everything that can be done.”

Mrs. Oliphant shuddered, and under pretence of breaking the news to her step-daughter left the room. Kate received the shock with much firmness ; and deep as was her anxiety, the only way in which she showed it was in her quick, eager glance at the letters each morning afterwards ; she seemed to perceive in an instant that there was none from Italy. During the few days that followed, she was very sad when alone,

rather fierce to Mrs. Oliphant, cold and reserved to every one ; for she had not confided to any of her friends the secret of her attachment, and on what other subject could she talk or even think just now ? It was plain, however, that she still hoped, and that she relied much on Stainmore's efforts.

A part of this interval of suspense was employed by Mrs. Oliphant in letter-writing. In spite of her suspicions, the honour of an alliance with Lord Stainmore had still an irresistible attraction for her ; for Kate and the world would never know the real circumstances of the case, whatever these might be ; and on further reflection it seemed an unchristian thing to condemn a viscount without the clearest proof. In any case, having long determined that Frank should never marry her step-daughter, she thought the present a favourable time for taking a decisive step. Two days after his

lordship's epistle arrived, therefore, she wrote the following letter to the artist as if she had heard nothing about his disappearance :—

“ Reinsber Hall, Dec. 12, 186—.

“ DEAR SIR,—I beg to inform you— which I do with considerable regret, for I know my intelligence will give you some pain—that Mr. Oliphant and myself have given our cordial consent to my daughter's engagement to a gentleman of large fortune and very amiable character. The match is just what *we* have wished all along, for we naturally hoped and expected that Kate would marry in her own sphere, and we have no doubt the union will be a very happy one. I hope you will not think harshly of Kate for taking such a step, in spite of the romantic friendship which she entertained for yourself, in consequence of your having saved her life. Your own good

sense, I am sure, will teach you that under the circumstances further correspondence with her would be improper : and after the marriage, I need scarcely say, we shall be glad to see you here again. Mr. Oliphant begs his kind regards ; and hoping that you are meeting with success in your profession, I am,

“ Yours truly,

“ JANE OLIPHANT.

“ P.S.—My daughter wishes me to enclose a note from her, that you may see her wishes are in full accordance with our own.”

The enclosure ran as follows :—

“ DEAR MR. HOLDEN,—Of course mamma’s letter will inform you what has happened ; I am sorry that I may not tell you at present who it is that I am engaged to, but we have agreed to keep the matter a

strict secret just now. By and by, perhaps, if you are good, I will let you know. I am very happy: but mamma thinks, and I quite agree with her, that we ought not to write to each other any more. With every kind wish for your future welfare, I am,

“Your sincere friend,

“KATE OLIPHANT.

“Signor Holden, Poste Restante, Naples.”

The last note was as elaborate a piece of composition as a bit of mosaic pavement; for Mrs. Oliphant, the better to imitate Kate's hand, had got some of her writing, and from this had traced each separate word on the semi-transparent foreign note-paper. It is scarcely necessary to say that the ‘gentleman’ referred to in the letters existed only in imagination, and that no one at Reinsber, except Mrs. Oliphant herself, knew anything about the two notes, or their being sent off. She looked on them

as a masterpiece of strategy : for if Holden were dead, they could do no harm ; and if, contrary to her very strong expectations, he turned out to be still alive, he would certainly never visit Reinsber again after such a curt dismissal, while any appeals or explanations in writing could be easily stopped by a minute inspection of the Hall letter-bag.

The much expected letter from Italy at last arrived, when the family were sitting at breakfast. Kate, as if by intuition, saw in the instant of Mr. Oliphant's taking it from the servant that it was again in Lord Stainmore's writing, and she felt that all suspense and all hope were over. She turned ashy pale, but, beyond a slight quiver of the lip, gave no sign of emotion, or even of impatience, as Jabez with an air of importance surveyed the letter coolly and slowly, first the direction and then the seal, and finally put it down unopened whilst he called for the maid to

bring him his spectacles—those in the ivory case. Mrs. Oliphant's cheeks also lost their colour, and she fixed her eyes on the cloth, giving only a stealthy glance now and then at Kate or the letter.

The spectacles were at length found, and Jabez, beginning with the date, and in a deliberate voice, read the epistle as follows :

“ Naples, Dec. 13th, 186—.”

“ MY DEAR MR. OLIPHANT,—At last all our dreadful suspense is over,—over, alas ! by finding our worst fears realised. Poor, dear Holden's body was discovered on the shore yesterday—washed up by the rough sea which prevailed during the night. It was found about a mile from the ruins, and was much decomposed——”

“ Kate, my dear, would you like to hear the rest ?” asked Jabez, kindly.

“ Yes, uncle—thank you,” whispered Kate.

“Decomposed, whilst there was a terrible slash across the face. In consequence of this, identification from the features was not very easy: the dress, however, and other circumstances, removed all doubt. In the region of the heart there was another wound—so deep that, in the opinion of the medical men, his death must have been instantaneous. It is some slight comfort to think that at any rate his sufferings were over in a moment.

“We buried him this afternoon in the picturesque cemetery hard by—myself, several of the English visitors, and a great number of the villagers attending the funeral. Everything was done simply, but in the nicest possible way, just as I thought he and you would have wished—and Mr. Shrimpton, an Englishman from Naples and a friend of mine, read our beautiful service in a most impressive manner. Poor fellow, there was scarcely an eye which was not

shedding tears for his untimely death ; I never saw more emotion displayed at any ceremony of the kind : but all the circumstances—his dying a stranger in a strange land, and then so young, so full of hope and legitimate aspirations, with such a future before him, yet cut off in this sudden and terrible manner without a friend present to receive his last words, or even one, except myself, to see him decently laid in his last resting-place—all this might well rouse the sympathies and affections of even the most hard-hearted, and I heard many of the crowd sobbing over the grave like children. His uniform kindness and geniality seemed to have made him a general favourite in the village, although he had been there so short a time.

“For myself, I have already told you how charmed I was with him, and how much I looked forward to seeing him again, both here and in England. We meet with so few persons in this world with whom our

feelings are thoroughly in unison that I at any rate cling to such men with singular affection. I feel as if I had lost one of the oldest and dearest of my friends, and the shock has been very great to me. What must it be to you and your circle, who had had such opportunities of knowing the noble young fellow better?

“The burial-ground in which he lies is a lovely spot, commanding a magnificent view of the bay. The ground is covered even now with masses of pretty flowers, and will be beautiful indeed in spring. The ceaseless murmurs of the sea reach the spot with a pleasant, soothing sound, as if they were whisperings of the glorious eternity he has entered on. It seems to me the very resting-place he would have chosen.

“I have already given directions about planting the grave with roses, and have ordered a simple cross of Carrara marble to be placed over him, with just his name, age,

and the date of his death upon it. But if you would like anything different, and will write, I shall be here for a week or ten days yet, and will attend to your wishes to the utmost of my ability. I think you once told me he had no relations, and, so far as you knew, no friends except yourselves.

“ There is as yet, I regret to say, no clue to the villains who have perpetrated this abominable murder: but I still hope they will be brought to justice, and I shall remit no effort on my own part to accomplish their detection. I am sorry to say, however, that the authorities here seem lax about the matter, and are rather disposed to hush it up, for fear of its driving the English visitors out of Naples! I have no patience with such selfish fools—they would not even let the newspapers report the circumstance!

“ When I return to England I will bring you two or three sketches of his which I

found in his rooms, and which I know you will all prize very highly, as they are probably the last he ever finished. I have also engaged a first-rate photographer here to take a series of views of the cemetery and the neighbourhood, which it may be a melancholy satisfaction to you to see.

“With very kind regards, and hoping to hear from you soon, I am,

“Yours most truly,

“STAINMORE.”

As soon as she could, Miss Oliphant got away to her own room to weep many a bitter tear; and for months there was unutterable anguish in her breast for him whom she had pictured in her own mind as the noblest and truest man she ever knew. There was deep gratitude too, for his sake, to that friend who had appreciated him so well, had tried so hard though in vain to save him, and had performed with such delicacy

and such feeling all that remained to be done, the last poor rites. And Time, the universal soother, carried away the dead lover into dim distance, and a region of misty splendour from which he looked forth a glorious angel with a bright halo round him of another world; but the friend was left, a living man,—to pursue his schemes with every chance in his favour.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. OLIPHANT AND THE BOYS.

TWO or three miles from Reinsber was a famous spring, called the Ebbing and Flowing Well, which for ages had been the object of much veneration ; and on Easter Sunday in particular was visited by a holiday-band of children who laid nose-gays of wild flowers by its side, and having come provided with bottles, and a supply of the black compound called ‘Spanish,’ used the water to make a sweet liquid, which was delicious enough to their unsophisticated palates. It was one of those odd customs which linger so long after their origin and cause are forgotten ; but it was

sufficiently harmless and, to my own mind, rather a pretty one.

This especial Easter-day fell early in the year, but spring happened to be early too, and a crowd of lads and lasses had assembled in the afternoon beneath the budding sycamores and the grey limestone scars that overhung the fountain. By the sparkling waters, therefore, there was plenty of laughter and many a sly joke going on, when some one shouted out “Eh, there’s Mr. Oliphant!” and all the mirth stopped on a sudden.

Since the dispute with Wideawake Jabez had scarcely been received in the village with quite the same deference as before, but often, on the contrary, with a little sulkiness and resentment that were ominous of revolt. Nor had his actions since that date been of a nature to increase his popularity : for he had endeavoured to revive the antiquated punishment of the stocks

for drunkenness, and had impressed on the churchwardens the necessity of their looking more strictly after the villagers who did not go to church ; while in the case of a widow woman, who was a devoted member of the S. P. V., but whose notion of propagating virtue turned out to be that of giving birth to it in the shape of an illegitimate child, he had insisted on her atoning for the peccadillo by doing penance at the church-door in a white sheet. This, however, she declined to do, preferring with extraordinary obstinacy even to have her name struck off the list of the society, the alternative that Jabez offered her. Not the less, however, on account of the odium which he had incurred by these acts of sincerity, did Mr. Oliphant determine that Reinsber should become what it ought to be. Great spirits swell, as he said, with the obstacles which make a small one shrink into nothing.

He had heard of this ‘well-flowering,’ and disapproved of it; but, when first seen, he was advancing at a slow pace, as if he meant generously to give the young culprits an opportunity for flight before his displeasure fell on them. None ran however; but, as he came up, they made way for him respectfully and in silence, and he paused for a few minutes to take note of the little ruddy faces, the bottles and the flowers.

“What is the meaning of all this, John?” he asked a boy he knew.

John blushed and grinned, but said nothing.

“I thought you would hardly be able to tell me, John,” continued Mr. Oliphant, “and I doubt whether there is any one here who is wise enough to tell me. It is an old custom, children, is it not?”

“Yes, sir,” said a number of them in chorus.

“Well, then, I think it is a very wrong

custom ; and I have taken the trouble to come all this way to tell you so. I am sure you do not know you are doing wrong, and I should like to explain the matter to you.

“ I have two objections to this usage. The first is that it is based on the grossest superstition. In the old pagan times the poor ignorant people used to think there was a special divinity presiding over each well, river, and tree ; and to this spirit they used to pray and offer sacrifices as to a Deity who had the power to do them good. Thus even Horace, who was a great poet and ought to have been above such foolish fancies, sacrificed a kid at the famous fountain of Bandusia. In the middle ages the presidency of these wells passed to the Saints — you find fountains everywhere going still by such names as St. Winifred’s or St. Swithin’s well ; and very often people thought that, if they bathed in

these or drank of the waters, they would be cured of any disease they might have, through the miraculous aid of St. Winifred or whatever saint it might be. Hence to propitiate him they laid on the brink of the well offerings of money, clothes, or flowers, as you are doing now. In placing the flowers here, therefore, you are either offering a sacrifice to the old deity of the well, not to God, that is, but to a devil—in which case you are heathens; or to its Roman Catholic saint, a mere man like yourselves—in which case you are no true members of our church, but idolatrous papists.

“My second objection is that this observance is a desecration of the Lord’s day. It was very wrong to come here at all to worship a devil or a saint, but surely it was worse to come on the very day which God has chosen for Himself, and which ought to be devoted to Him.

You ought to have been at church instead."

"Please, sir, we've been to church," said a tiny, trembling voice.

"Then you ought to have gone again," answered Jabez, sternly ; "or if you did not, to have spent the rest of the day in thinking about God—not in profane revelling and loud laughter such as I heard when I came along. On Sunday we are or ought to be in God's presence all day, and do you think it is right that sinful creatures like ourselves should laugh or even smile before Him ?

"I hope, children, you will let us have no more of this, but will now quietly go home and pray God to forgive you for your great fault."

Then, having kindly assured them further that he would himself pray for their forgiveness, Jabez turned grandly away from the

rebuked crowd of youngsters. They had been very quiet during the whole of his sermon, and looked ashamed of themselves, but whether they were benighted heathen or idolatrous papists, in one of which classes Jabez had so clearly proved them to be, life, holidays, and Spanish-juice were still sweet to them ; and the moment Mr. Oliphant's back was turned one little urchin, bolder than the rest, or inspired by the outraged naiad, shouted out in a mocking tone, " Old King Congo !" Jabez faced the enemy instantly, and, exclaiming in a voice very like the first growl of thunder, " Who said that ?" advanced up to them. There was of course a general flight on the part of the godless youngsters, and Mr. Oliphant thought it scarcely consonant with his dignity to give chase, possibly, too, remembering that he could not catch them. He turned again, therefore, like a majestic lion

that is content with having scattered the hunters without eating them, and took his way homewards—pursued, to his great disgust, for more than a mile with a chorus of “Old King Congos.” Boys and girls are an imitative race : and ever afterwards, I am sorry to say, it was considered a prime joke among them to waylay Mr. Oliphant, and salute him from behind a corner with these three odious words.

Jabez reached home in a state of magnificent indignation, and in the course of the same week composed and despatched a long epistle to the Rev. John Hawtrey, the master of the Stainton Grammar School, at which most of the young offenders were pupils. In this, he not only enlightened Mr. Hawtrey in full as to a schoolmaster’s duties, but demanded the summary expulsion of the culprits. The head-master declined point-blank to expel them ; where-

upon Jabez, rising into anger against Hawtrey himself, referred the matter to the governors of the school, who, however, deaf to many noble and fiery invectives with which he favoured them, resolutely supported their head-master in his refusal to interfere.

Still our hero was not to be put down, and, going to the root of the evil, he determined to have a school of his own; which accordingly he built, and a Mechanics' Institute as well. He stocked the library of the last with the best English classics and (knowing the importance of modern languages) several good works in French and German. But, alas! this literary feast too was spread in vain:—the carles, with execrable taste, preferred a pennyworth of the *London Journal* at their own fireside, or a pot of ale at the Lion.

CHAPTER VIII.

KATE FORMS ANOTHER ENGAGEMENT.

WHEN Lord Stainmore returned to England in the spring, the first visit he paid was to Reinsber. He brought with him Frank's last sketches, and also some beautiful photographs of the cemetery and the place where he was killed. These the young nobleman said he thought the Oliphants, as the poor artist's only friends, would naturally like to preserve ; but if they could spare one of the sketches, he wished to keep it himself, as a little memento of one whose character he admired so greatly. Altogether his delicacy and tender sympathy for the dead won the

admiration and boundless gratitude of Miss Oliphant. Her buoyant spirits had now quite deserted her, and she spent most of her time in silent grief.

It was very pleasant, however, to have some one with whom she could talk freely on the only subject she cared for, and the viscount established himself on the most friendly footing with her. During his visit, too, he advanced much in Mr. Oliphant's good graces by renewing his interest in that gentleman's various philanthropic schemes, and also contrived by his unremitting courtesy to remove any suspicions which Mrs. Oliphant might still entertain about the painful circumstances attending Frank's death. With all the Oliphants, then, he gained ground every day; but if any preference could be observed, his chief attentions were still bestowed on Dora.

At the beginning of June, he came again

and found Kate still sad, but with the sadness no longer of violent grief but of tender regret. Then he broke ground, first with Mrs. Oliphant, and next with Jabez. Of the former's co-operation he had no doubt; but rather to his chagrin, as he thought after all that it was no trifling act of condescension to ally himself with a commoner, Mr. Oliphant received the information that he was in love with Kate without showing the slightest surprise. Jabez, however, knew his own merits so well, that, as Fothergill once said of him, he would scarcely have been surprised if the archangel Michael had suddenly appeared before him and presented him with the sun, or half-a-dozen stars, as a token of the distinguished regard of the celestials.

"Then I presume," said Mr. Oliphant, when the other had finished, "that your object in telling me all this, Lord Stainmore, is to ask my consent, as her natural

guardian, to your paying your addresses to my niece ?”

“Of course—if you would be so good,” replied the viscount, inwardly cursing the other’s slowness. But in reality it was only Mr. Oliphant’s business-like way of making sure of his ground before going on.

“Well, I am extremely gratified at such a proposal, my lord, and no one can think more highly of you than I do ; but—but—”

“But you would say I must get Miss Oliphant’s consent, too ?”

“Why, no — not exactly ; though, of course, that is also a *sine quâ non*. Still, I have a doubt, and it is one which I feel some difficulty—a thing very unusual with me—in expressing. I scarcely know how to touch on the matter with sufficient delicacy.”

“Perhaps you would like a word about money-matters,” said the other, watching

Mr. Oliphant's face keenly, and thinking of the numerous mortgages, post-obits and acceptances (the remnants of bygone Jewish dispensations), which encumbered the fair Stainmore property almost up to its value. "I should wish you—I should of course insist on your going into these details with me before the marriage."

"I beg you will not say another word about money: in any event my niece will have enough, and to spare. It is my present intention to leave her all I have, so that she will be in possession of a not inconsiderable fortune at my death."

"An event which I hope and trust is far distant, my dear Mr. Oliphant! But if your objection has no reference to our fortunes, I cannot imagine what it can be. Surely, no scoundrel has dared to breathe anything against my character?" he went on with a little show of indignation, but a good deal of real misgiving. Had any of

the queer stories about him in India reached Reinsber? Or was it that he had not shown himself quite so much interested in the S. P. V. of late?

“No, no; not one word, I can assure you. In fact, such gossip would have weighed little with me, for I am accustomed to rely on my own opinion of men, and—merely of course from having had much experience—I very rarely find myself wrong. No. My difficulty is of another kind,” Jabez continued, with a slight blush; “and my only fear is that you may think me a little crotchety for entertaining it.”

“I shall not easily think so.”

“Well, I know my opinion is not that of the mob, but I have long thought that the intermixture of races is most injurious to mankind, and ought to be prevented wherever prevention is possible. Now it happens, most unfortunately, that you and Kate seem to belong to different races.

She is very fair, and has all the characteristics of the Teutonic type, most strongly marked ; while your own dark hair and eyes prove you, I think, to be of Celtic origin. However much, therefore, such a union would otherwise delight me, I fear I should be acting very injudiciously, and even weakly, in giving my consent, and I must take time to reflect on my decision. I trust your love is ardent enough to keep for a while, my lord ?”

The viscount, well-bred as he was, could hardly resist a laugh on perceiving the unexpected rock which Mr. Oliphant’s sagacity had discovered in mid-ocean after passing the real and dangerous shoals without observing them. But he answered very seriously :

“ This is indeed a new light on the matter, Mr. Oliphant. I am so inexperienced in these grave questions I really do not know what to say.—Yes, my attachment is

profound enough, but of course, if *you* advise me to do so, I will endeavour to overcome it, and, however hard my own fate may be, I shall always thank you for giving me the benefit of your very great experience and common-sense."

"It is a pleasure to me—yes, a very great pleasure, Stainmore, and—and, you know, you must not misunderstand me. I only meant to imply that the unlucky circumstance I mentioned had created a doubt, a difficulty, in my mind; not that I had formed any final decision which could not be reversed."

"But what is your advice to me?—or at least do oblige me with discussing fully a matter so important to me. Do you consider the union of different races always an evil?"

"I very much fear it is," answered Mr. Oliphant, gathering himself up for a full account of the question. "Take the case

of hybrids—the impure breed does not last. Again, as an authority on turf matters, you must know that blood is the first essential in a race-horse ; and blood means purity of the breed. With regard to mankind, superficial thinkers will say that the population of England is of more complex origin than that of any country on the surface of the globe, and will point with self-complacency to the proud position our country occupies at the present moment. I reply that England is great in spite, and not in consequence, of this complexity ; that there is every reason to believe we should stand still higher in bodily and mental vigour, in civilisation and in power, if our blood had been pure. The most robust men at present in the world are the Red Indians, a race which till lately has had no opportunity for intercourse with any other. What is their history ? The white man comes ; he mixes with them, and they sud-

denly decay, dwindle, and in a short hundred years go out. So the biggest and strongest Englishmen are these in our dales; the puniest are the inhabitants of our large towns. And why? Why, because in the dales, rockbound and secluded, families mainly of the same race have naturally intermarried with one another generation after generation, and have developed in this way the primitive excellence of the breed to its highest point; whereas in cities, where the scions of many races are associated together from various causes, opportunities for mixed marriages, with all their pernicious consequences, are only too frequent."

"You have made the general principle, alas! only too clear," said the wily viscount, after he had allowed Jabez to exhaust his eloquence in this way for nearly an hour. "I cannot deny that you have convinced me—as indeed you always do

whenever I happen to find myself on the opposition bench to yourself. But in this particular instance can you suggest no palliation, no remedy? Must I not only lose the dearest object of my ambition but, what I considered of scarcely less importance, the superintendence of a father in the proper management of my estates? I assure you, so diffident am I of my own powers in this respect and so fully alive to my great responsibilities, that I had looked forward to your constant co-operation in promoting the welfare of my poor tenants as an inexpressible support to me. Now I fear I must be content with the colder and more occasional advice of a friend! I am very unfortunate."

"Well,—well—not so fast, my lord,—we *must* take time to consider the question in all its bearings," said Jabez, immensely gratified. "I need scarcely say how delighted I should be at all times to lend you

my poor assistance in the way you mention. It is certainly very hard on all of us. Let us see. There are no doubt red-haired individuals among the Jews."

"From which you would argue that a dark-haired Englishman might possibly be of Teutonic blood, I suppose?"

"Yes—though very exceptionally," said Jabez rather eagerly, for he too was beginning to be anxious to find a reasonable way out of his own dilemma. After all a rich young nobleman, with such a proper appreciation of fathers-in-law and the S. P. V., was not to be met with every day.

"By the way, a little circumstance just occurs to me as having some bearing on the important question we are discussing. Before I went out to India my hair was by no means so dark as it is now. It was rather brown, as I remember.—But I suppose this fact would make no difference in the matter of race?"

“There you are mistaken—very much mistaken, Stainmore,” exclaimed Jabez triumphantly. “It makes all the difference in the world. How truly fortunate that you remembered the circumstance! We shall be all right yet, I see.—A rich nut-brown, was it not?”

“Certainly; how wonderful now that you should be able to guess that!”

“Then I wish you success with my niece most heartily. You probably belong not to the Celtic race at all, but to the Scandinavian branch of the Teutonic. The German branch of the last great stock is easy to distinguish, not so the other. Red hair is probably the ordinary characteristic of both; but with a tendency to run into golden hair on the one hand, and darker brown on the other.”

By many other learned arguments did Jabez now convince his lordship that he had red hair, and might lawfully, therefore,

become a suitor for Kate's hand. Stainmore listened with wonderful fortitude, and had his reward in Mr. Oliphant's full sanction to the proposed match, and in his promise that he would use his utmost influence and authority with his niece.

From the latter, the viscount feared a more determined opposition; but when he broached the subject, his proposal was received in the same gentle emotionless way in which she took most things now.

"I am deeply honoured by your offer, Lord Stainmore," she said, "but I must have ample time to consider it. You have heard, I suppose, of my previous attachment to poor Frank?" She guessed this from his manner.

"Yes, Kate; from your mother."

"You must give me a fortnight; you will not mind waiting so long for my answer?"

"A year, if you wish."

“Nay, that would not be just to yourself. I will speak to you again on the subject in a fortnight.”

She was pleased by his delicacy when he went away from Reinsber for that time, leaving her to form an unbiassed decision. It was a fortnight of sad and anxious reflections; for her youth and all the pleasures of life, nay, the very possibility of violent joy, seemed buried for ever in the grave of Frank Holden. Just at present she was in the state of one who has been struck down by the paw of a wild beast, a state in which they say you feel no pain, but only a dull numbing sense of all that has happened or will happen, and lie motionless without either care or hope. But she also belonged by nature to that nobler class of women who exhaust the whole well of affection at the first draught and cannot love twice. She admired Lord Stainmore indeed, as warm-hearted enthusiastic girls

always do admire a handsome and accomplished man of the world in whose sincerity they believe ; and she was beyond all measure (and certainly beyond reason, if Mrs. Oliphant was right) grateful to him for the delicacy and kindness he had shown in the case of her poor lover. How she would have acted, had she never seen the latter, we are not prepared to say ; but as affairs stood, her feelings towards Stainmore were those of admiration and gratitude alone, not of love.

In doubt herself, she took Miss Mansfield into her confidence, and told her the whole history of the last two years, together with her present perplexity. Dora sympathised warmly with her, but in the hope that a new lover might in time charm away the melancholy which seemed likely to cast a gloom over the rest of her friend's life, strongly advised her to accept Lord Stainmore's offer. And when Kate had

also talked the matter over with her uncle and step-mother, and found how earnestly they wished for the match, she doubted no longer. For herself, indeed, as we said, she looked for no happiness, nothing but placid contentment, in this world : but if she could add anything to the happiness of those who were dearest to her, her forlorn life would be well spent in the effort. She would make the viscount clearly understand her real feelings, and then, if he still persisted in his suit, she would accept him, and be as good a wife to him as she could.

“ I have now told you all, Lord Stainmore,” she said towards the end of their next interview. “ It is, you see, but a poor second-hand affection which I can give you, and you deserve something better than that.”

“ I shall get far more than my deserts if I succeed in winning you, dearest Kate,”

answered Stainmore—and for once I agree with him.

“ Well, then, as you can be content with a faded little heart like mine, there is my hand.”

The whole thing was more like will- than love-making ; but the viscount was jubilant, for he knew the nature of women, and had abundant faith in his own powers of winning her affections by and by, when time had softened her present grief. Even if he failed, he thought that a beautiful girl and a fortune of a million would not be a very bad bargain.

CHAPTER IX.

DISCONTENT.

MISS OLIPHANT went the next morning to tell Dora the news of her engagement. Dora embraced her fondly :—

“ O Kate, I am very, very glad,” she said, “ and I do wish you every happiness. You will be happy with him, I know, and I am sure it is for the best.”

“ Why are you so sure, Dora ?”

“ Because I cannot bear to see that pale face of yours : if you only knew how sad it makes me !”

“ Well I confess I have doubts about my

happiness, but if this marriage can add anything to theirs"—and Kate burst into tears.

"He is everything you or any girl could wish,—virtuous, generous, accomplished, and he loves you devotedly."

"Yes, yes, he is all that—far too good for a poor, broken-hearted thing like me ; and I shall try hard to love him. But I do not know whether I have done right—I cannot tell. I have all kinds of dreadful presentiments."

"You must pray for help, dearest Kate ; you know it will be given us if we ask earnestly enough."

After more talk of this kind, Dora crept nearer, and, with the prettiest little blush and smile, said in a half-whisper—

"And now, Kate, I have some news for you about myself."

"What is that?—Nay, is it so, dear?" answered Kate.

“Yes ; *he* proposed yesterday, too ;—and I am very happy.”

“Darling, I always said it would be so. Tell me all about it.”

“I don’t know whether I can,—it all looks like a dream ; but Mr. Fothergill—William, that is—came in last night to tea, and after tea mamma had gone out, and then he told me I can’t say it as well as he did, you know, and I scarcely know what he said but he was very kind, and talked not at all in his ordinary, laughing way, saying he had found out at last that he loved me better than any one, and wondered he had never found it out before ; and then he pretended to have been very bad, and wished to be very good, and asked me to help him, and said, oh so many kind things !”

“And I do not know any one who will help him so well. But how had he found this out ?”

“ Well, he pretended (you will not be vexed, Kate? he was only in fun, you know, and it was very absurd), but he said he had never known how much he liked me till he saw Lord Stainmore attentive to me, and feared he might lose me. And I told him what a goose he was, and that Lord Stainmore never had been particularly attentive, but of course he knew that very well.”

“ And then ?”

“ And then I told him he must speak to mamma, and mamma was very glad, and I was very glad ; only I ran away to my room. But he told her he should like it to be soon, and we are to be married in two or three months.”

“ A nice impatient bridegroom at any rate ! But I hope I may be your bridesmaid, Dora ? I am a capital hand at arranging a *trousseau*, and—and I should like it very much.”

“But you will be married yourself before then, Kate?—unless indeed we could arrange to be married on the same day. How pleasant that would be!”

“No—no,” ejaculated Kate. “I shall not—I will not be married this year,—not till after Christmas at any rate, perhaps not till long after that. Let it be as I say, dear.”

Dora consented, for she saw that to press her own wishes farther would give her friend extreme pain.

“I almost forgot to mention it,” she said as the other was going out, “but have you seen this notice of a public meeting, or something, about the school? I am afraid it may rather annoy your uncle.”

“Indeed! Where is it?”

“It is posted up everywhere, and you will be sure to see it as you go back. Mr. Oliphant ought to be told.”

Kate had no difficulty in finding the bill,

which was stuck up prominently in every part of Reinsber, and ran as follows :

PUBLIC MEETING.

NOTICE is hereby given, That a Public Meeting will be held on the Green, Reinsber, on Thursday, the 10th instant, at Noon, for the purpose of considering the conduct of a certain gentleman in the neighbourhood with reference to the boys at the Grammar School, and of thanking the governors and master for their action in the matter, &c. The attendance of parents and all persons interested is earnestly requested.

STEPHEN MOORBY.

RICHARD WIDEAWAKE.

JAMES HAWTHORNTHWAIT.

When Jabez was informed by Miss Oliphant of the notice, he went out to read it, and grew exceedingly angry as he became convinced after two or three perusals that his first suspicions were correct, and that he was himself the gentleman referred to. One thing, however, was plain, that the

people of Reinsber must be saved from such folly ; and he went straight to Moorby, whose name was first of the three at the bottom of the placard, and who was a small yeoman in the village. Hawthornthwaite also chanced to be in Moorby's house at the time, and was smoking a long clay by the fire, with his thin legs stretched out ; but beyond a sleepy nod he took no notice of Mr. Oliphant's entrance.

"This is a very strange placard you have issued, Mr. Moorby," said Jabez, by way of beginning the subject.

"If ye niver see ought queerer nor that, ye'll do weel. Ye've browt it on yersel, Mr. Oliphant," replied Moorby.

"Then I see I was right in considering this bill directed against myself?"

"Don't ye think ye deserve it—trying to tak their bit o' schooling away fra honest lads aw for a bit o' fun?" asked the other.

“I shall not condescend to discuss the point with you, sir.”

“Condescend, an’ be d—d to you, Mr. Oliphant!” exclaimed Moorby. “We’ve lived on wer ain land, father and son, for three hundred year wi’out owing onybody ought,—honest, dacent, sober folk ’at ’ud pay wer way an’ tak wer gill wi’ ony man; an’ that’s mair nor mony o’ yer girt folk can say. Condescend! That’s a good un, isn’t it, Jimmy?”

“Good,” said Jimmy, without taking the clay out of his mouth.

“Well,” said Jabez, “I merely called to advise you to withdraw this notice quietly, because, as being in some measure responsible for the preservation of the peace, I really cannot allow you to hold the meeting in the place you mention.”

“I did not knaw ’at we’d axed yower leave, Mr. Oliphant,” retorted Moorby; “but, just for curoosity like, what for

sudn't we hev t' meeting on t' Green if we want?"

"The Green, sir, in my opinion, is a most improper place for the purpose. It is a large open space——"

"Well, that's just what we want for a big meeting, isn't it?" interrupted the yeoman. "It'll hod mair people, an' we're wishful to hev as mony as iver we can."

"But so large an assemblage will necessarily lead to riot."

"An' how can it lead to riot? It taks two sides to mak a quarrel, an' we're aw o' yan mind about yer conduct; man, woman, an' child, ye willn't find yan i' Reinsber to back ye out i' what ye've done, nauther about t' school nor t' stocks, nor yer bonny notion o' dressing up Dolly Robinson i' a white sheet. If there's a riot ye'll have to mak it yerself,—willn't he, Jimmy?"

"Hissel," echoed the other.

“That may be your opinion, sir, but it is not mine. My other reason for thinking the Green very unsuitable is, that damage will probably be done to the public property and—hem—the statuary there by a tumultuous meeting.”

“What, t’ town pump an’ owd Hercules?” asked Moorby. “Well, an’ if he did get his nose knocked off, it wadn’t be mich loss to t’ community at large, I’ve thinking.”

“Perhaps not, but these are my objections. Now do not *you* think them reasonable, Mr. Hawthornthwaite?” he added, turning to the other farmer, who was still stolidly and silently engaged with his pipe.

“Shalln’t alter, mysel,” replied James, first rolling out a great cloud of smoke.

“T’ lang an’ t’ short on it is ’at ye think poor folk owtn’t to hev meetings, mair especially about yersel; isn’t that it, Mr. Oliphant?” said Moorby, slily.

“Nothing of the kind,” replied Jabez, in great haste. “The right of public meeting, in a proper place, and for a proper purpose, and under proper supervision, is sanctioned by the law of the land, and has my fullest approbation. It is one of the proudest privileges of Englishmen, sir, a chief bulwark of civilization and freedom. And as regards myself, of course you are welcome to say what you like; however unjust, or coarse, or . . . or insolent your remarks may be, they will not trouble me. But—doing violence to my own feelings—I must prohibit this meeting on the Green, however much I may approve of meetings in the abstract.”

“Well, where’s t’ Abstract? If it wor a place equally convenient, I’s e no saying but we might hod t’ meeting there instead of on t’ Green, as ye wish it sa mich, Mr. Oliphant.”

Jabez opened his eyes in astonishment

at the ignorance of this summoner of meetings, and then explained.

“Then, if we can’t hod t’ meeting on t’ Green, where mun we hod it?”

“That is your business, sir.”

“Wad ye lend us yan o’ yower fields, Mr. Oliphant?”

“To condemn myself? Certainly not,” answered Jabez, with another stare at the fellow’s impudence.

“Then, is there ony other place ye could recommend, likely an’ proper, as ye say? Can ye tell us of ony, acos I’ve never heard o’ yan mysel?”

“I really cannot recommend any such place because I do not think there happens to be one at Reinsber. It is of course a great public want and very unfortunate.”

“Varra, varra,” replied Stephen, sarcastically. “Then yer liking of a meeting i’ t’ Abstract seems to me, when it’s weighed, just to come to liking a meeting i’ No Place.

But I'll tell ye what, Mr. Oliphant ; we'll hod t' meeting, an' we'll hod it on t' Green, for aw ye've said, an' aw' t' mair acos ye don't like it."

"Very well, sir, if you choose to brave the civil power, the responsibility rests with you, and I shall send you notice to that effect."

"We shalln't alter : child's play, that," repeated Hawthornthwaite.

Mr. Oliphant retired, muttering to himself in broken sentences, from which a casual listener might have guessed what was passing through his mind, "Humph ! ... *Will* hold it, hm ... see about that ... Insolence ... Set authority at defiance ? ... Riot Act ... military force ... stop this." He sent the notice to Moorby, and further took care that a large placard, signed by himself as a magistrate, and warning all whom it might concern of the dangerous consequences which would ensue from their

attending a meeting prohibited by authority, should be posted conspicuously about Reinsber. He then commanded Tommy Doolittle, in his capacity of constable, to be in attendance on Thursday, and prevent any evil-disposed persons from assembling on the Green ; and also gave proper notice to Harry Highside, who was a captain in the yeomanry, to have his troop in readiness in case of any disturbance. The time which remained after these preliminaries were arranged he devoted to private rehearsals of the Riot Act, for he would have been grieved if he had failed to deliver it *ore rotundo* on an occasion so important. On the other hand, the directors of the popular movement, not a whit alarmed by these vigorous preparations, issued a counter notice stating that the meeting would be held in spite of the prohibition.

CHAPTER X.

AN INDIGNATION MEETING.

THURSDAY morning found Doolittle at his post. The little man was nervously anxious to perform his duty to the satisfaction of his patron, Mr. Oliphant : but as the Green was a large triangular piece of ground with three roads opening on it, he had his difficulties ; for as he said, no man could well be in three places at once. He looked pale then—"frightened," some of the mob pretended, and they often advised him to strengthen himself with a dram of brandy as the best possible preparation for the great labours in store for him. But he sternly refused to give up his principles,

and by dint of fussing about and excessively civil remonstrances, such as "Will you oblige me by moving on, gentlemen?" or "Now, do be quiet, please," contrived to keep the mob, whilst it was thin, in pretty good order. When the concourse thickened, however, as twelve o'clock drew near, he had harder work: for, while he was engaged in entreaties at one end of the Green, the crowd, which now consisted of five or six hundred persons, rather enjoyed the fun of swarming over the rest of the open space, and thus bringing him back bathed in perspiration.

At length, just as the church clock pealed forth the hour of noon, a simultaneous groan and shout announced the arrival of Mr. Oliphant by one road and Moorby with his supporters by another. At the same time a rush from all sides towards the statue of Hercules in the centre fairly swept Tommy off his feet and, before

he knew what he was about, carried him twenty or thirty yards forward in spite of his frantic struggles and expostulations, which began with entreaties to the "gentlemen" to "please, please, be quiet," and mounted up in a finely graduated scale to the fiercest threatenings in the Queen's name of the tread-mill, transportation for twenty years, and at last of still longer punishment in a far hotter place to the "wicked roughs" who were hurrying him on. Some kind friend in the crowd, however, stopped the torrent of his ejaculations at last by knocking his hat (which, like all little men, he wore both high and a size too large) clean over his face, so that nothing but his chin was visible below. In fact, as one of the crowd remarked amid the roar of laughter which followed, Tommy was as neatly put out all at once as a "lilli-low" with an extinguisher. Still faint, strange sounds, like the mutterings of

very distant thunder, continued to issue from below the hat, but altogether inarticulate, so that whether they were pleadings for mercy, or invocations of vengeance, or merely a late wish for the brandy, as some of the bystanders averred, must remain unknown. All effort to set himself free, however, was utterly in vain, for his arms were wedged tight in the crowd, one of whom also snatched Tommy's staff of office from his hands, while in the crush his coat was unintentionally ripped from top to bottom. In this strange condition, then, was the sole representative of the civil power first swept on, and then hustled, pushed, and shouldered forward close to where Mr. Oliphant had stationed himself, by the side of Hercules cleansing the Augean stables.

That gentleman—Jabez, not Hercules, though I dare say the latter would have acted much in the same heroic manner—in spite of the groans with which he was re-

ceived, had advanced with a firm step and resolute countenance ; and the mob, partly from old respect and partly from a good-humoured admiration of the pluck which the old man showed in confronting alone such a mass of hostile faces, had made way for him till he stood on a step of the pedestal which supported the statue. He was there met by Moorby, who took his station close by.

When Tommy found himself free, his first act was to lift his hat as quickly as possible (for such extinguishers go on much more easily than they come off), and his next to take a long, long breath :

And he breathed deep and he breathed long
And he greeted the heavenly delight of the day.

Then he looked up and saw Mr. Oliphant, who meanwhile was considerably surprised to perceive what had appeared a strange, headless figure transformed as if by magic into Doolittle.

“Aa, man !” was Tommy’s first exclamation. Then “I couldn’t help it, sir, indeed I couldn’t,” he said. “I’ve done my duty, sir, and Lord Nelson or Dr. Lees himself couldn’t do no more.”

“Who has dared to treat you thus, Thomas ?” asked Jabez in a determined tone. “Point them out, will you ? that they may be made amenable to the laws.”

“Lord bless you, it was all of ’em. Laws, sir !” cried Tommy in despair.

“Aye, all—it was all of us,” shouted the crowd ; and then they gave three groans for Mr. Oliphant.

“Well, it is an abominable outrage. You see, Mr. Moorby,” said Jabez, turning to the demagogue, “that my fears about the consequences of this meeting were not unreasonable. An atrocious breach of the peace has been committed already in this assault on Doolittle. I shall immediately proceed therefore to read the Riot Act and

call on this assemblage to disperse. If they do not, I shall take stronger measures."

Then Jabez commanded silence, and with an important 'hem' of preparation, read the Act through, in a voice so grand and solemn that some impression must have been made on the crowd if they would only have listened. Such a chorus of groans and "Old King Congos" however was the accompaniment of every sentence that the words were altogether inaudible. At the end he ordered all peaceably disposed persons to go home immediately and, telling them that the military would be there directly to enforce obedience, stepped down from his platform and began to make his way out of the crowd.

The news which now spread through the mob that "he says t' sodgers are coming" excited a good deal of indignation, together with a little alarm which would scarcely have been felt had the real circumstances

of the case been known ; for Captain Highside's efforts to procure a respectable force had not been very successful. In fact, when he sent a summons to his troop, they all began, like the men in the parable, to make excuses of the most opposite kinds. One of the troopers had to go to the top of Reinsber Heights for turf, another to descend a well, while the number of those who were compelled to visit fairs on that particular day, for the purpose of buying or selling stock, spoke volumes for the prosperity of the Reinsber farmers, though the long sick list and the variety of complaints, ranging from heart-disease to stomach-ache, might have made a stranger wonder how the natives contrived to live through it all even while they thrived so well. Even of those who promised to attend, scarcely any made their appearance, while it was very observable that those who said they did not mean to come kept their word with the

most religious strictness. Harry used afterwards to swear (I should have written "say" in the case of any other man) that of those who had been too ill to mount their horses on the occasion he saw at least half a dozen taking the benefit of the air on foot in the middle of the crowd. But as he was a good-natured fellow and never very positive about anything except the excellence of a horse or cigar, he used to end the statement by saying that "he did not believe his own eyes;" whereupon Fothergill once assured him "he did right, when they had seen double so often." However, as the result of all his exertions, Captain Highside had taken the field on this eventful morning with a magnificent troop of two men, and at their head was waiting near the Green for Mr. Oliphant's further orders.

The efficiency of the force had been even further impaired without their captain's knowledge. One of the troopers was a

tenant of the Highside family, a short fat man who had never been known to utter more than a monosyllable at a time, and had turned out because he always did what he was told. Like most fat people, however, he was excessively good-natured, and was not considered dangerous by the Reinsbercarles. But the other, O'Callaghan, was a fire-eating Irishman, thin, tall, and raw-boned, who had been in every "shindy" for the last ten years for the pure love of it, and had declared he meant to have somebody's blood before night. The leaders of the popular party therefore had laid a snare for him through one of their number, a smart, active, little cobbler, as sharp as one of his own needles. Accordingly, while Captain Highside and his troop were waiting in the street in battle array, the cobbler suddenly made his appearance with "Mr. Oliphant's compliments, and, as it was a cold morning, he had sent the men a jug

of spiced ale." The gift was a very welcome one ; but while the Irishman was doing justice to it, the other contrived, without being seen, to pour a quantity of hot cobbler's wax into the valiant hero's scabbard, and then went off to fetch Harry some brandy.

During his absence Mr. Oliphant arrived. He had been extricated from the crowd with some difficulty, and chiefly by Moorby's assistance ; for when the mob, besides groaning themselves hoarse, were proceeding to hustle him and throw orange peel at his hat, Stephen suddenly interfered, and, crying out "Nay, nay, now ; fair play, lads ! He's an owd man an' a plucky 'un," burst a way through them by main force, Jabez following safely in his wake.

"Now, don't ye be rash, Mr. Oliphant, I beg o' ye," said the yeoman respectfully, as they emerged : "what can one man do again' a thousand ?"

The other's answer was stern and heroic :
“ He can do his duty, Mr. Moorby.—But I am obliged to you for escorting me out of this misguided crowd ;” so he bowed graciously and turned to Harry.

“ Captain Highside, I must now request you to act. I have read the Riot Act, and the crowd refuses to disperse. You will therefore do your duty.”

“ Certainly, Mr. Oliphant ; what am I to do ?” asked Harry, pluckily.

“ You have to order the mob to disperse, and if they will not within one hour from this time, you must use your force, and compel them.”

“ But there's just the hitch—I don't quite see——How am I to compel them ?”

“ That, sir, I leave to your discretion and better judgment,” replied Jabez loftily, and turning on his heel : “ the civil power is now at an end, and that of the military is begun. I hope to hear a satisfactory

report from you as soon as the little matter is finished, Captain Highside."

"But I say, Mr. Oliphant," — Harry began as the other was disappearing. Jabez, however, had gone so far that by attracting his attention, the captain would also have let the forces under his command into his perplexities, which he was general enough to know would be impolitic.

"‘Little matter,’ indeed!" groaned Harry: "he might have stayed to help one a bit. Curse him, he says ‘Disperse ’em’ as grandly as if I’d a whole regiment. I’ll be shot if he ever saw at all that I had only two men with me!—Hang it if I know what’s to be done. . . . However, here goes for something. — Troop, draw swords; walk; trot."

Harry, still with an artful eye to Kate, for whom he did not yet know how hopeless his affection was, eagerly desired a chance of making headway in her uncle's

good graces, and thought the present an excellent opportunity if he only knew how to use it. Besides, he had a natural aristocratic aversion to the common people, whose conduct on the present occasion in presuming to censure one of their betters he looked on as an arrant piece of impudence. There was a wide difference, in his opinion, between the right of judgment on Mr. Oliphant as exercised by the governors of the school, and by a mob. On all accounts, then, he was well disposed to second Jabez, and disperse the crowd, if he could.

But when the squadron, turning the corner at a gallant trot, came in sight of the mass of people on the Green, Harry's sense of his difficulties increased. Sundry imprecations, too, began to be heard from the right-hand man of the troop, O'Callaghan, who, ever since the word had been given to draw swords, had been tugging

away at the hilt, and was now holding a warm altercation with the implement in question—

“And what’s the matter with ye now, as the man said to his grandmother’s ghost?—O bother and all the powers, and it’s oiled ye I have, and rubbed ye, and polished ye till ye were as bright as a new sixpence, and ye must behave in this way, bad luck to ye, ye ungrateful article!—Come now, arrah mavourneen. . . . Shure, and ye’re a divil and no mistake.—O murther, if the captain sees us!”

“Silence there—no talking in the ranks!” shouted the captain crossly. — “As if I hadn’t bother enough, by Jove, without having to keep these fellows in order. . . . Curse it, Callaghan, why don’t you draw?”

“Shure, and it’s not good will that’s wanting, captin, but it’s bewitched it is.”

“Rusted to the scabbard, you blackguard, I suppose, as usual.”

“ Oh the divil, now, and I spent three hours over it yesterday, when I ought to have been in bed, sir, and my elbows ’ll never recover the scrubbing it cost me !” and the Irishman gave the refractory sword the last of a succession of strong tugs, which ended in its snapping off at the hilt.

When the three wheeled round the corner, the mob had been at first somewhat alarmed, considering them only the vanguard of a larger force. As the news spread, however, that these were the only military likely to make their appearance, they were greeted with vociferous cheers and laughter ; which were not diminished by O’Callaghan’s misfortunes, or the fat figure of the other trooper, who was no great rider, and who rose and fell and rolled about on his saddle like a keg of whisky badly tied on a donkey’s back.

They were now in the crowd, and Harry kept saying, “ You must disperse, good

people—you must really disperse ;” at which the mob laughed broadly, in a good-humoured way, but one that perplexed him more than ever. But the fiery Irishman shouted out, “ Bedad, I’ll fight the whole lot of ye for a ha’porth of toffy !” and suddenly flung the hilt, which he still grasped, at somebody’s head. On this showers of rotten eggs and stones began to fall on the valiant three, and when O’Callaghan, in a fury at being struck, lifted his scabbard and hit some one, he was pulled off his horse in a twinkling by a score of vigorous dalesmen, who hurried him, struggling and kicking, to the beck, where they ducked him well by way of cooling his over-ardent spirit. At the same time several voices cried out to the other soldier, “ Run, Jack, run ! thou hadst best gang hame quietly ;” and the complaisant farmer, seeing the fate of his comrade, set spurs to

his horse and jogged off homewards, laughing like the rest.

Harry remained alone. He was very indignant, but what could he do? Dick Wideawake, however, who was always kindly disposed, seeing the young fellow's embarrassment, stepped up to him, and said—

“Come now, Mr. Highside; ye see ye can't do ought, an' we nane of us want to harm ye. Lord bless ye, we'd do ought i' reason for a Highside. Just ye come an' hev a noggin o' whisky wi' me at t' Red Lion, an' we'll talk matters ower.”

Harry really thought this was the best plan, and walked off by Dick's side, the mob cheering them loudly.

Thus left in possession of the field, the popular leaders gave utterance, in very broad Yorkshire, to many speeches, which, as they were by no means distinguished for brilliance, the reader of these chronicles

will not be sorry to escape. It is enough to say that what the Reinsber carles wanted in wit, they made up in virulence, and that 'tyrant' and 'old fool' were the least emphatic of the many hard names which were given to the monarch of Reinsber. They groaned at every mention of his name, and unanimously passed a resolution condemning his theories, his practice, and himself. On the other hand, they passed a fervent vote of thanks to Mr. Hawtrey and the noble army of governors, for the glorious and immortal stand they had made in defence of the liberties of Reinsber; and then some one suggested that Mr. Oliphant should be burnt in effigy that night in front of his own door, a proposal which was in vain opposed by Hawthornthwaite and a few of the more prudent carles.

The gathering at night in the Hall grounds, which the inmates were unable to protect from this revolutionary intrusion,

was far larger even than the meeting at noon. The figure of the arch-enemy consisted of a pole dressed from the plunder of the worst scarecrows in the neighbourhood. A hollowed turnip, with eyes, nose, and mouth cut in it, and a lighted candle within, formed the head, which was gracefully bound round with a wreath of sage and sloe-leaves, to vindicate his claim both to superior wisdom and the title of Old King Congo ; while bits of tin-foil, and the strangely-lettered paper which covers tea-chests, had furnished appropriate, if not very brilliant, ornaments for his dress. The effigy was carried honourably on the shoulders of half-a-dozen men with blackened faces, and, after some more speeches, Old King Congo was unanimously called upon for a song. There being no response, a wag in the crowd expressed his opinion that the gentleman was not worth a song, and proposed that, as he would not contribute to

the public amusement in one way, he should be made to do so in another. On this some tar-barrels were lighted on the carriage-drive in front of the Hall door, and the effigy, seated on the top, was consumed amid great enthusiasm. Three more groans for Mr. Oliphant, who heard and saw everything from the library, and, strange to say, three cheers for Miss Oliphant, ended the day's amusements, and the mob separated.

BOOK IV.

MR. OLIPHANT DEPOSED.

CHAPTER I.

MR. OLIPHANT TAKES FURTHER PROCEEDINGS AGAINST JOHN HAWTREY.

COMPLETELY successful in alienating the common people, Mr. Oliphant for the future turned his arms mainly against the aristocracy of his little empire. “It is always necessary,” says Machiavelli, “to live with the same people ; but a prince has no occasion to continue the same set of nobles, whom he can at pleasure disgrace or honour, elevate or destroy.” If Jabez could not take vengeance on the whole

neighbourhood for the late proceedings, he thought he could at any rate punish their prime author, John Hawtrey, and for this purpose he seized on a malicious report first originated by the three Saints of Stainton.

In starting a slander, these ladies had always shown a skill which was only matched by their ingenuity in keeping it afoot. They were not bad-hearted people ; but with them, and therefore with the majority of the Stainton world (for at Reinsber their influence had waned, as we saw, before the rising star of Oliphant), there was always at any given time some one person who like the king could do no wrong, and some one else who served as a sort of foil to the other, and was an incarnation of all the vices. The first was usually a pet curate, some silky-mannered and bland-spoken man, who was also required (for the Saints were strict as to his

qualifications) to be young and unmarried, to have a good figure and a handsome face, and to possess unlimited powers of endurance in the way of being stroked, purred round and adored; other points, such as sincerity, zeal or abilities, were of comparatively small importance, and it was really touching to see out of what extraordinary materials the ladies sometimes contrived to make their male-Madonna. The set-off to the reigning favourite was generally to be found in a candid, blunt, or impetuous man, to whom for some reason or no reason at all, except, perhaps, that he tried to go his own way regardless of the world or of them, they had taken a decided dislike. The poor scapegoat had a rather hard time of it. If he went to church less frequently than the old maids, he was a godless infidel who did not care for sacred things; if he went oftener, he was a hypocritical Pharisee; if he went just the same number of times

as themselves, why, they wondered how he could do it. When thrown into their society, if he talked, he was a bear ; if he were silent, a bore ; while if he took the wiser course and avoided such hostile company altogether, then he was a sour and sullen misanthrope. In the long run, by snubbing him to his face and abusing him behind his back, by calumniating him to the few friends he had, and by setting the whole neighbourhood against him, they generally did him the unintentional service of driving him away to seek a freer atmosphere and kinder judgments elsewhere.

As Fothergill used to say, therefore, the Saints were extremely religious, but their religion mainly consisted in having a visible god to worship and a visible devil to hate. Between these two extremes, however, the black and the white, lay the rest of their acquaintance, with all of whose names, by

way of a change, they made free occasionally, though not persistently. In this intermediate group were Hawtrey and Mrs. Mansfield, and very soon after the latter left the Hall, Miss Beecroft having ascertained from the servants the full details of certain visits of the old schoolmaster, the maiden ladies began to whisper abroad that "it was very strange Mr. Hawtrey should be so much at Mrs. Mansfield's; he stayed the other night till eleven o'clock; it seemed very improper and even indelicate; they wondered how a lady of Mrs. Mansfield's good taste could allow him to do so." By and by "they had proof positive that the magnet was not Dora, so it must be Mrs. Mansfield—an old lady of seventy—ridiculous—shocking!" But their horror reached a climax when Letitia reported that Mrs. Mansfield's servant had actually gone into the room one night and found her mistress seated on the same sofa with the

aged widower. From that time, whenever they mentioned the fatal visits, it was with a little shrug of pious abhorrence, more convincing than the direct evidence of a dozen witnesses.

The two delinquents, however, had either never heard of the scandal or were resolved to brave it ; and as people grow tired of constantly harping on the same topic, the malicious comments of the neighbourhood had almost ceased. About the beginning of December, however, Mr. Oliphant chanced to hear an allusion to the matter, and, though before his correspondence with the schoolmaster he had laughed at the very same thing as absurd tittle-tattle and had forgotten it directly, it now began to assume great proportions in his mind and to appear inexpressibly shocking.

Thinking it only generous to give even an enemy the opportunity of reformation before he was publicly exposed, he wrote to

Mr. Hawtrey. After protesting that he was actuated only by public and not at all by personal motives, he said it was reported in the village that the schoolmaster frequently stayed at Mrs. Mansfield's till late at night, and had even been surprised when sitting on the same sofa with the lady, and that in consequence grave and most injurious inferences had been drawn, much to his and the lady's prejudice. Jabez begged to be informed if the above particulars were correct, and trusted, if they were, that Mr. Hawtrey would give him an assurance the visits should cease ; otherwise he would feel bound, in the interests of morality, justice, and I know not what, to take other steps.

Mr. Hawtrey replied that "Mr. Oliphant's protestation about his disinterestedness was unnecessary, for it was superfluous to defend what had never been attacked ; though it was certainly unfortunate (so far

as appearances went) that his regard for morality should have slumbered in this case till there was a dispute between them. But he begged to inform him that the facts, as stated, were perfectly correct, and he did not doubt the old women of the village, male or female, would make excellent capital out of them when subjects were few or talk was dull ; further, that if Mr. Oliphant so pleased, he was quite at liberty to draw any inferences he liked from the said facts. As to his own future conduct, however, he intended to visit Mrs. Mansfield that very night, and hoped, in the lack of better matter, to have a good laugh with her over the epistle he had just received from the Hall ; and in conclusion, he expressed a pretty strong opinion that it would be as well if Mr. Oliphant, besides attending to the public business, would occasionally mind his own.

*Mr. Oliphant indignantly rejoined that “it

was very well known he had now no business to mind, and that he considered such an allusion a gross impertinence ; insinuating furthermore that it was strange indeed if his great cares and labours in the cause of philanthropy had not placed his motives above suspicion. He begged to say, however, that he was not deceived or intimidated or shaken in any way by the flippant and insolent tone of the other's letter ; but he regretted that Mr. Hawtrey should not at once have given a full explanation, and should even determine to continue his visits, notwithstanding he was now aware of the scandal they caused." Jabez thought, and supported his view by several eloquent but very closely written pages, that even if " the inferences, drawn from the facts now admitted, were false (though he had observed his correspondent carefully avoided denying the truth of those inferences), still it was Mr. Hawtrey's duty as a Christian,

a man, and a schoolmaster, to give up his own pleasure for the public good ; for how could either the parents of the boys, or the governors, or the neighbourhood, have any confidence in one whose name was under a cloud ? Like Cæsar's wife, a schoolmaster should be above suspicion. He hoped therefore, that, if for no other reason than to avoid a public exposure, Mr. Hawtrey would reconsider his determination ; and he kindly offered before proceeding to the ulterior steps he had hinted at in his first letter, to argue the point with him still farther, by way of removing any difficulties he might have."

To this John briefly answered that " he was not afraid of exposure when there was nothing to expose ; and, for proof that in spite of this petty calumny he had lost the confidence neither of the neighbourhood nor the governors, he referred in the first place to the fact that the school was never so

full, and in the second (if he could do so without exciting unpleasant reminiscences) to Mr. Oliphant's own recent correspondence with the board. He would give up his friends for no man, and wished Mr. Oliphant would do what he liked without talking so much about it. As for continuing the controversy, he begged to say that as a schoolmaster he was naturally most familiar with the *argumentum baculinum*, but he was also acquainted with the *argumentum ad hominem*, and of late had sometimes thought he might be able advantageously to combine the two methods; but with regard to Mr. Oliphant's speciality, which seemed to be *argumentum ad infinitum*, he begged altogether to decline having anything to do with it, or to do anything else than remain his most humble servant."

In fact it was a very pretty exchange of courtesies, though Jabez was hugely disappointed at its abrupt termination. But he

consoled himself by addressing a last appeal to Mr. Hawtrey, a very fierce and threatening one, though doomed like all the rest to be ineffectual.

CHAPTER II.

A VISION.

ON Christmas eve the Oliphants had dined at two, for there was to be a servants' party in the hall at night. Sir George Highside and Mr. Truman had joined them at table by special invitation, Mr. Oliphant having to discuss some important business with them afterwards, and probably thinking they would be more tractable after a good dinner. Lord Stainmore was expected to arrive in the evening for the purpose of spending Christmas day with the family which was so soon to be more nearly connected with him — the wedding being now fixed for new year's day.

When Mrs. Oliphant and Kate retired, the latter, in spite of the snow which lay thick on the ground, slipped away to the village, with a few seasonable presents for some of her humble favourites. After her visits she called at the house of old Dame Nelson for the key of the church, and, declining her escort to the sacred edifice, told her not to be uneasy if she stayed there some time. Then, stepping pensively across the churchyard, she opened one of the side-doors and was soon in the building alone.

This was the day, as she remembered only too well, on which poor Frank Holden, two years before, had said he would return to her if he lived, and her heart was aching still, with a pain that she knew would last her lifetime, at the recollection of him. Calm indeed she was and resigned, but with a dull feeling of helplessness at her fate and of necessary incompleteness in all her life

that was to be afterwards; though she would not murmur even to herself at the inscrutable doings of God. Still she could not and did not even try to repress the unutterable tenderness that fluttered about her breast whenever she thought of him, (and when did she not think of him?) the gush of sorrow, the tears, the blessings that came unsummoned at his name. I daresay the three Saints of Stainton would have thought all this very wrong when she was the affianced bride of another man; but, O Father of mercies, not so judgest Thou.

With these feelings, then, she had stolen away for an hour or two of quiet communion with the dead, on the day he had named for his return. The next week was likely to be a busy one with preparations for the wedding, and she might not soon have such an opportunity again. She closed the church-door behind her and, gliding to the

steps before the communion-table, knelt reverently down before it, resting her weary head on the rails, with many tears and prayers for strength and guidance in her trial. The moonlight streamed full upon her through a window of stained glass on the right, and made her look like the picture in Keats :

Rose bloom fell on her hands together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her head a glory, like a saint :
She seemed a splendid angel newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven.

This window had just been put up by Mr. and Miss Oliphant in memory of the ill-fated artist, Kate's only stipulation being that it should be finished by this day ; and her face, as she leaned on the rails, instinctively turned towards it.

By and by a strange feeling all at once came over her, that Frank was near—that he had actually returned as he had pro-

mised, if not visibly or in body, at least in spirit, and was hovering about, watching and sympathising with her. She was not superstitious, and could not account for the fancy which had taken possession of her so suddenly ; nor was the thought accompanied by any terror—Frank would not harm *her*. There was even a calm satisfaction in the close intercourse she seemed to be holding with him ; and, with a half-formed notion in her mind that the spirit might hear her, she prayed aloud in a broken voice : “ O Father, if it had been Thy will that he had lived ! Or now, if he did but know how I love him still ! And if it is right, O God, that this marriage should still be, give me Thy help and strength for ever.”

After half an hour more spent in these thoughts and devotions, she rose, still with the same strong sense of a spiritual presence about her, and casting a look round as if she almost expected to see the appar-

tion [of her lover. The dim arches and aisles however appeared as usual and gave no sign. She turned, therefore, and slowly making her way out of the church, locked the door after her. But before she had taken three steps from the porch, a grey figure seemed to rise from the ground and come towards her. She recognised it, she was sure—it was Holden in the dress he had usually worn, when alive !

We said that Miss Oliphant was not superstitious ; like many other sensible persons, she had no very definite opinion, one way or the other, on the existence or non-existence of apparitions of the dead. Just at present, however, she was scarcely in a state to form as clear a judgment as usual, for she was in bad health and low spirits, while the loneliness of the churchyard, which was some distance from the houses and hidden from them by dark trees, might also increase the nervousness produced by

illness. Nor had she ever once doubted the fact of the artist's murder.

Hardly breathing, therefore, and with a stony fixing of her eyes, she leaned against a head-stone for support as the figure advanced, floating, as it seemed, noiselessly along the snow. Its face, awfully like his, was towards her, bright in the moonlight, and, as it came opposite, a strange convulsion passed over the features. Without stopping, however, the form swept on a few feet beyond her—and she breathed again and gave a long sigh of relief and yet of dissatisfaction. Then she trembled—for, in spite of her feelings in the church, there was something appalling in being thus face to face with the world of spirits, and might it not be some fiend in disguise?—as the figure turned and at last stood before her in silence, but with its pale face writhing with emotion. Confused as she was, the thought, based no doubt on old traditions

of ghost stories, had flashed across her, that apparitions could not speak unless they were first spoken to ; and all her old courage came back to her as in awe-struck, yet longing tones, she murmured :

“ If it troubles you, it shall not be.”

Then, after burying her face in her hands to conceal from her view the form that still stood opposite and silent, she whispered :

“ Merciful Saviour !—you are not angry with *me*, Frank ?”

But before Frank, for it was he, could master his own agitation sufficiently to speak a word, the shock overpowered her, and, if he had not caught her, she would have fallen to the ground. Placing her on a broken tombstone close by, he supported her head on his breast till she should recover, and meanwhile had leisure to curse his own folly in not approaching her more discreetly, and to wonder whether it would be better to run for assistance, or wait till

she came to herself. He could not guess from anything she had said yet that she thought him anything but a living man, and as he imagined he had taken sufficient care to apprise her by recent letters that he was still in existence, he ascribed her swoon to the same cause which had made him unable to use his own voice for a time—the natural agitation produced by the first meeting of two persons, one of whom has treated the other very cruelly ; for this was the light in which he regarded Miss Oliphant's conduct. Mrs. Oliphant, however, though considerably surprised herself to find in the Hall letter-bag one morning decided proofs in Frank's handwriting that he was not murdered after all, had carefully abstracted them, and had never hinted even at the possibility of his being still alive. She was hoping that, before the fact was known, the marriage between her daughter and Stainmore would have taken

place ; *then*, what the artist might say or do would matter very little.

Miss Oliphant opened her eyes at last, and muttered dreamily, and with a visible shudder : “ Is it gone ? Oh, why did he not take me with him ? He looked very angry, I thought, and pale. Poor, poor Frank ! ” Then suddenly becoming conscious that she was supported by some one, she tried to raise herself, and went on : “ Thank you, sir ; I can do very well by myself, now : it was a sudden faintness, that was all ; do not say anything about it, please. Nay, leave hold—who is it ? ” and feeling herself still held, she looked up in Holden’s face, and when she saw it, fainted again.

Frank poured into her ears expostulations and apologies, and the sound of his familiar voice had an effect even in her half unconscious state ; for when she looked up again, her fears had ceased, though her

mind was evidently wandering back to the time when she had been his pupil.

“Yes, it is very pleasant, Frank,” she murmured with a smile: “and would it not be as well to put a little blue in the foreground? I know she will never approve of it, but you will not go away to-day? I have had a terrible dream, I think, or something. Do you know I dreamed that they positively wanted me to marry some one else—some lord or other—and you—oh, you were drowned—drowned, Frank—and all kinds of horrible things!”

The artist, who now perceived that Miss Oliphant’s swoon had arisen from her still supposing him dead, took advantage of the gleam of consciousness to explain, by chiming in with her present delusion, how affairs stood.

“Absurd, Miss Oliphant! You *feel* that I am not dead, but a living man. You dreamed wrong, you see. It was all a mis-

take about my dying. The body that was found was not mine at all, but that of some unlucky Neapolitan. I had——”

“O Frank, Frank, how silly I was!” she suddenly exclaimed in her natural tone, and looking up at him in wonder and delight. She had not heard what he said, only the sound of his voice, but she had now recovered consciousness, and with it came the conviction that she was really supported by flesh and blood, and by no one else than Holden himself. Then she hid her face on his shoulder and burst into tears, with a storm of conflicting emotions in which wild joy was certainly predominant.

The artist held her in silence for two or three minutes till he saw she was a little calmer. Then he released himself very gently but firmly, and stood before her.

“Well, now that you are sufficiently recovered, Miss Oliphant,” he said in a

broken, faltering voice, which gathered strength, however, as he went on, "it will be only right that I do my errand; the sooner the better,—heaven help me. But first I must beg your pardon for the great shock I gave you by appearing so suddenly."

"I wish all shocks ended as pleasantly, Frank," murmured Kate, with a sort of low cooing satisfaction.

"Perhaps I ought rather to apologise," he went on, with sudden bitterness, as if roused to anger by the very kindness of her answer, "for coming here at all, or even for being alive when I am so little wanted; however, I thought my two letters to you would have satisfied you I was still living and well—as well at least as—as——"

"Your letters, Frank! I never got them," exclaimed Kate, as he hesitated.

"Ah, well, no matter. They have mis-

carried, I suppose, like all the rest—everything does miscarry with me now, I think. I ought—” here his voice broke down in a passionate sob, and it was an instant before he could go on, “I ought to have thought of *that*.”

“Nay, do not say a word more about me. It was not your fault, dear Frank, and I am very weak. It is strange about these letters. But surely,” she continued, tenderly looking at him, and taking his hand, “all the old luck has not left you?”

“It was not of myself I came to speak, Miss Oliphant,” he replied, withdrawing his hand at the same time; “I would not have intruded on you for that. I came—a long journey—on your own account, to warn you; and if you had received my letters and answered them, as I expected, this very painful interview might have been spared.”

“O Frank, how coldly you speak! It is

not painful ; it is very pleasant. I cannot tell you how glad I am."

"By the living God, Miss Oliphant, I *must* curse you if you talk like that," exclaimed the artist with intense fierceness, his eyes flashing fire and his words almost over-leaping one another in his passion. In her excitement she had not realized till now the change in his tone, or indeed the gulf which had opened during the last twelve months between herself and him ; and sickened once more with doubt and apprehension she sank on the tombstone for support, as he went hastily on. "Alive or dead, I will curse you if you pretend to be glad to see me now. Anything but that! Is it not enough that you have destroyed my dreams of all that was lovely and beautiful and noble in woman, blasted my youth, killed my ambition, dried up the very springs of hope and common kindness in me—all this not enough, but you must

laugh at me as well ? But psha ! I will be calm. Just let me do my errand and go."

"Your errand ! What errand ?" asked the frightened girl.

"To warn you," he replied, again summoning his composure and speaking gently yet proudly, "to warn you earnestly against this new engagement you have formed. If you had got my letters and acknowledged them, my visit would have been superfluous ; but as you did not write, I determined, very reluctantly, to come here and see you in person. Do not misunderstand my motives. Of course all is over between *us* for ever ; I know that perfectly—as well as you do ; and perhaps it is right to say, though it seems rude, that in the very improbable event of your being willing to renew our engagement, I am not. No ; I am a poor artist, but not quite a dog to be whistled on or off at your pleasure or the pleasure of any woman in the world. I

only wish you to be clear on this point, and not to fancy that I am trying to reinstate myself in your good graces by lowering a more fortunate rival. I came here because I thought common justice and charity required me to do so, just as I should go out of my way to prevent an utter stranger from walking over a precipice ; from pity for you, and, perhaps—I will not deny it—from some tenderness still for one I once loved so passionately. I wish to let you know, therefore, what this Lord Stainmore is.”

Kate was crying. “ Oh, Lord Stainmore ; and what of Lord Stainmore ? ” she asked coldly. She had positively forgot the viscount’s existence, and did not much care to be reminded of it. Frank, however, misinterpreted her manner, and replied :

“ You do not wish to hear anything against the reigning favourite ? Well,

it is natural, and I will say my say very briefly.

“When I disappeared, you probably, like all the rest of the world, supposed me murdered by brigands; and so far as the intention went, that was the case. I was attacked by them, but escaped—for what good purpose it would take a wise man to say. However, so it was, and the story of my escape was sufficiently wonderful. I may, perhaps, tell it you in full,” he went on with a pained smile, “if ever we meet again—years hence, I mean, when we have forgot all about this or are grown too old to have much feeling left. Well, whilst I was with these fellows, I ascertained that they had been employed by some one else, some scoundrel who was eager for my death, but too cowardly to strike the blow himself; and I afterwards became acquainted, on proofs which at least completely satisfied myself, and which I believe would

satisfy a court of justice, if it were worth while, with the villain's name who hired the brigands. Miss Oliphant, that villain was no other than your bland and noble and all-accomplished friend and future husband, Lord Stainmore."

"Is it possible? But what are your proofs of this?"

"They are there," replied Holden, handing her a small bundle of papers; "but they are too long to go through now. It is enough that they satisfied me on the subject; and I think, if you carefully peruse them, you will be satisfied too. In the package there is also an account of the previous career of this estimable nobleman in India, the correctness or falsity of which you will easily be able to ascertain through some of your friends in the army. Do so; make full inquiry, and then—marry him if you like: my task, now that I am assured these proofs are safely in your own hands,

is done. Yet I would not go without imploring you, by the love you once felt for me, or if any service I have ever done you still touches your heart at all—as you value your own happiness on earth or in heaven—nay, as you must stand one day before the Almighty God to render an account of your life—I implore you, whatever may be your fate, not to entrust it to a blood-stained hypocrite like this. And now—I cannot say more—I shall break down again if I do, and I will be calm—now, farewell, Miss Oliphant, for ever and yet for ever ; and—and, after all—may you—well, I will still try to think kindly of you.”

His last words, in spite of his avowed determination to remain composed, were almost inaudible with agitation ; then with one last look he turned and walked slowly away.

Miss Oliphant still held the packet mechanically in her hand. She was blinded

with tears, and bewildered, yet all her pride was roused by the cruel way in which (as it seemed to her, who knew nothing about Mrs. Oliphant's letter enclosing the forged note from herself twelve months ago) Frank had so scornfully rejected the affection she had shown on his strange re-appearance. She too turned haughtily away without a word, and took a few lingering steps in the opposite direction : but it was with an aching heart, for she felt that such a parting must be, as he said, for ever, and that her life was a blank once more. It was hard that the cup of joy should have come so near her lips only to be dashed away.

When she had gone a few yards, therefore, either her courage failed her, or kinder feelings came back. She stood still and turned towards him again.

“Mr. Holden—Frank !” she said in a low voice, in which tenderness was fighting hard with pride.

Frank's ears that night were quicker than usual, for he was now many yards distant. He stopped and looked back.

"Well, Miss Oliphant?"

"Do you think, then, it is right that we should part, you and I, without a word of explanation?" she asked.

He came back to her slowly, and with evident reluctance.

"I do not quite see what explanation there can be, Miss Oliphant, or what we can say which has not been said already, in writing or otherwise," he answered gently. "But if you like to say anything more, and do not find it too painful, or if I can be of any further service to you, why, speak by all means—it is only bearing up a little longer," he muttered to himself.

"I know that you may think I have not done right in forming this new engagement," she said, seating herself again on the broken tombstone, and covering her

eyes with her hand: "at times I have thought so myself. But I should have fancied that simple justice would make you ask what my reasons were, before you judge me so very, very harshly."

"If anything you say alters that harsh judgment, I will bless it with all my heart," exclaimed Frank as she paused; "but I do not know that I have thought so very bitterly of you, after all. Sometimes, indeed, in my agony, I fancied that Fothergill might be nearer the truth in his opinion of you than I was, with my inexperience of the sex. He once depicted you to me as a terrible and heartless flirt."

"Mr. Fothergill did?" asked Kate with a slight contemptuous toss of the head, which was caused by the recollection of a certain interview of her own with that gentleman.

"Yes; and that was why your pretending to be glad to see me, forsooth, after this new engagement, made me so angry

just now. I could have torn you to pieces then, because you seemed doing your best to justify his hard opinion of you, after I had been trying so many months to think better of you, and had succeeded at last."

"And pray, how did you think of me?" asked Kate angrily.

"Why, as a fallen angel of light, Miss Oliphant," he replied; "fallen, fallen indeed from the heaven of heavens to earth, but an angel after all, with ineffable glories of her old home still lingering about her, broken lights of beauty, halos of purity that could never leave her, seraphic memories of love and tenderness, in her heart reverberations from the throne of God—but all faint and dim and marred by this new and astounding taint of mortal weakness. Such I have thought you—such I think you now as you sit there—and such I would gladly think you for ever in my own solitary future."

He paused, but as she did not speak, he went on in a calmer strain :

“It is all natural enough, I said to myself. She was grateful to me far beyond my merits, because I had been fortunate enough to do her a service, and in her inexperience she mistook that gratitude for love. She was then thrown into the society of a man who was infinitely my superior in everything but honesty, and she soon discovered that there was room in her breast for far warmer feelings than any she had ever entertained for myself. She set her mistake right, threw me over, and took, as she ought to have done, the man she loved. But in her affection towards me she was at least sincere at the time. This is what I came to think about you, Miss Oliphant, as you are curious on the point.”

“You did me no more than justice, Mr. Holden,” said Kate haughtily and coldly ; “you did me less than justice. I loved

you as I have loved no one since, and one of my chief reasons for accepting Lord Stainmore's hand was his friendship for you—this and the hope that thus my own life, which seemed dark and dreary enough, might not throw a shadow over others. They all wished it, and after your death, as we thought, what had I to live for but their happiness?"

"And so, by way of showing your appreciation of this assassin's intense friendship for me before he had even once set eyes on me, you jilted me in his favour! Well, I have often heard of woman's perfidy and her excuses for it, but this—however, no matter—you shall not vex me again—it is a queer world."

"I did not know he was an assassin, and I do not quite see how I could jilt the dead—as I supposed you to be," replied Kate, preserving her temper admirably.

"God of heaven, she will drive me mad

yet! If I had been dead, as I wish I were, it would of course have mattered little; but, after all your vows and promises, you accepted him when I was living and you knew I was living and thought me likely to live. Or perhaps you will even disclaim your own letter, so kindly announcing the fact to me? O Kate!" His old affection seemed involuntarily to lodge this final protest against any further display of her baseness.

"What letter?" exclaimed Kate, her anger now fairly breaking out. "I do disclaim it. This is intolerable, Mr. Holden."

"What letter! Your letter enclosed in Mrs. Oliphant's—short and sweet, like a lawyer's laugh—written, forsooth, on the self-same pretty pink note-paper and sealed with the self-same blue wax that I had kissed and pressed to my heart ten thousand times before—your letter telling me in half a dozen lines, without preface,

cause or apology, that you were going to be married to some great man, and were as faithless as hell; and sounding, by Jove, just as if you expected me to write you a warm, congratulatory note by return—the letter that, coming just after my wound—but, psha!—the letter you wrote, Miss Oliphant, just before you heard of the attempt on my life and after you had been engaged to Lord Stainmore for some weeks.”

“I never wrote such a letter at all; and I only became engaged to Lord Stainmore last June, many months after I supposed you dead—and then only for the reasons I tell you.”

Frank was staggered: “You—never—wrote—such a letter!” he repeated after her in profound amazement.

“Never—never in my life.”

“And you only became engaged to Lord Stainmore six months ago! O Kate, you

would not—you could not deceive me twice?” His last words were in tones of such infinite pathos, and were accompanied by a look of such eager yet pleading tenderness, that they swept away at once the feeble barrier of pride which Kate had just now been so busy in erecting against him.

“Dearest Frank,” she exclaimed in the sweet, musical voice of other days, “I cannot be deceiving you twice, because I have never yet deceived you at all. Believe me it is all as I say, and there is some mistake about this letter. Either you have dreamed its existence in your illness——”

“Nay, dear Kate, I have it here in my pocket,” and Frank began fumbling nervously and excitedly for the important document.

“Then you have been imposed on by some villain who has passed it off as mine. Whoever wrote it, it is a gross, base for-

gery. But we will look into that by and by ; never mind it now."

Her tone would have carried conviction to one much less eager than Frank to believe these pleasant tidings. And as he thought for a moment, he remembered it had once or twice occurred to him that the writing was much less firm than Kate's usual hand ; this, however, he had ascribed to her natural agitation on penning such an epistle. But now the truth flashed on him like a revelation.

"Dearest, how can you forgive me ?" he asked.

"Nay, dear Frank, if you got such a letter, I do not wonder at anything you have said. But you ought to have known me better."

Perfect amity being restored, "And now, Frank," said Kate as they sat side by side on the broken tombstone, "I must hear your story—or will you put it off till we are eighty, as you threatened ?"

“Nay, dearest; but I will not tell you a word of it till you let me know clearly what you are going to do about Lord Stainmore and me. I am dying with suspense to know whether of us you will choose.”

“I do not know that I shall choose either of you now,—but at any rate I think I shall decline the viscountship. As for you, I plead a mutual and complete release long ago. Seriously, Frank, we will have no more rash or unknown engagements, and I will promise absolutely nothing till my uncle knows everything.”

“Well, you know it was not my fault, or indeed yours, that our engagement was a secret before. But, ah, Kate, at least I may hope?”

“I am not aware,” she replied, laughing and half turning her face away, “that I have the power to prevent the exercise of any of your own feelings you like. You are a free agent I suppose.—But come, it is

beginning to snow again, and I am nearly dead with cold ; let us go into old Dame Nelson's for your adventures. I must take her the church key, and I have no doubt she will let us sit by the fire and talk ; and she is so deaf that any secrets in the story may be told without fear."

Accordingly they went into the cottage, and when Miss Oliphant had exerted herself to explain what they wanted, the old woman, who remembered Holden and was pleased to see him again, not only placed chairs for them by the fire, but obligingly took herself off to a neighbour's house. Frank and Kate therefore were left alone, and the former proceeded with his narrative.

CHAPTER III.

FRANK'S NARRATIVE.

“**Y**OU doubtless know from Lord Stainmore or otherwise the way in which I disappeared. I was painting some ruins by the seashore with the great volcano opposite — the prettiest spot, Kate ; I must take you there some time. I had been engaged on my work for about a month, and was on my beat one sunny afternoon, a few days after our noble friend visited me there. I was singing, I think—it is a trick of mine when I am at work by myself—and at the same time considering, I remember, whether I ought to put in or leave out a certain big

stone in the foreground, when I was rather startled by hearing the sound of some one pressing roughly through the brushwood a few yards behind me. I glanced round, and, to my consternation, saw three truculent-looking fellows advancing towards me at a run. There could be no doubt about their purpose, for one of them had a gun in his hands and another a drawn stiletto. Of course I sprang up instantly and faced them, snatching up a strong oak stick, which was the only weapon I had; for, being so near Naples and having a vivid knowledge of my own poverty, I had been fool enough to consider myself perfectly safe from brigands. They came at me without a word, and, though I made the best resistance I could and succeeded in flooring the scamp who carried the gun, the odds were too great; so after receiving two or three wounds from the stiletto, I was at last knocked down and stunned by a blow on

the head from the butt of the gun, which one of them had picked up. No doubt they thought me dead ; and how long I lay insensible I cannot tell, but it must have been some minutes ; for, when I came to myself, they had already rifled my pockets and torn from my neck the locket which contained somebody's hair, Kate, who was very dear to me, besides slashing up my poor landscape and scattering all my other things. What recalled me to my senses was a shrill voice close to me, and when I opened my eyes I saw a young girl kneeling by my side with uplifted arms and apparently pleading for me with all her might to one of the three ruffians. Her face, which was one of the most beautiful I ever saw——”

“ Upon my word, Frank, I am not certain yet that I shall give up Lord Stainmore,” said Kate.

Frank laughed and continued. “ Her

face was full of excitement. With what seemed an effort in the dull state of my faculties, I remembered her as a girl whom I had often seen about the neighbouring village where I lodged, and whom I had been rather kind to—if giving her a few coppers and a pleasant word now and then deserves the name of kindness. In fact I had pitied her a good deal, for she seemed scouted and ill-treated by all the village because her father was a bad character and in prison. It afterwards turned out that she was actually the daughter of my ruffian-in-chief, whose name was Carlo, and who had just been released from gaol, having left her during his confinement to support herself as she could by begging about the streets of her native village; which Carlo (when he was not engaged in smuggling or robbing) considered his home, just as any respectable Christian might have done. Francesca was a true child of the south, ve-

hement in her hates and likings, and passing in a moment from tears to laughter. During my stay at the village she had become somewhat attached to me, and had several times followed me to the ruins, staying for hours either there or on the shore close by. It appeared afterwards that, happening to be strolling about the beach this very afternoon, she had hurried up on hearing the noise of the scuffle and found her father and his friends hard at work as I described."

"Poor thing, what age was she, Frank?" said Kate carelessly,

"About twelve or so."

"Oh!—but I must not interrupt you in this way."

"Not if you mean me to finish my tale to-night, dear. Well, she was bending over me, and pleading with an impassioned voice: 'For my sake! you will not kill him, father mine?' she cried in her beautiful Italian, which sounded prettier than ever

to me just then, I assure you ; ‘I love him—I love him ! I have gathered these flowers for him—see. He is the flower of my heart. When I was hungry, he said *Eat* ; when I was thirsty, he said *Drink* ; when they would have beaten me, he struck *them*’ (that was an awful lie by the way) : ‘and you will kill him ?—Oh—h—h !’

“ ‘I must, Francesca,’ said Carlo piously ; ‘it is an engagement, and with me engagements are sacred.’

“ ‘An engagement, father !’ she replied. ‘But if it is right to keep your engagements, it is also right—it is more right not to hurt my benefactor. Give him to me, father mine, and I will give you a thousand kisses such as you love.’

“ ‘Nay, nay, little one ; though if it had been any trifle, I should not have minded, and I am sorry it is one who has been kind to you. St. Peter ! what are we to do, mates ?’

“ ‘Do ! why, you don’t mind a little chit like that, captain, surely ? Stick the stiletto into him at once,’ said the man I had knocked down. ‘As he knows the girl, he’ll have the police on us at once if we let him go.’

“ ‘No, no, he will not ! he will be good ! I will answer for him,’ cried Francesca. ‘We will carry him away and hide him in the sea-cave—safe, father—if you ever loved me at all !’

“ ‘Ay, and carry him a quarter of a mile in the sun, with the chance of meeting somebody,’ said the other fellow, clubbing his gun at the same time to knock me on the head. I was quite helpless, and so weak with loss of blood that I could not stir a muscle to save myself, but Francesca threw herself furiously between the fellow and me, hissing out the words, ‘It is abominable !’ and then calling piteously on her father.

“ ‘Don’t hurt the girl, Leonardo,’ exclaimed Carlo, fiercely, ‘or you’ll have to settle the matter with me. Come away, child, directly, immediately; I command you: he must die.’ ”

“ He tried to seize and pull her away, but she slipped through his hands, snatching Leonardo’s stiletto as she did so. When she had bounded off a few yards, she stopped and, like one possessed, pointed the dagger at her own breast. I never in my life saw anything so beautiful as her attitude.

“ ‘Strike! villain—dog!’ she shrieked, ‘strike! Then I will kill myself—and you will be glad, father, and you shall have no little Francesca to fill your pipe or nurse you or kiss you. I hate you and I will die. And I will tell my mother in heaven and she will hate you. Strike. Ay—ay!’ ”

“ Carlo stood scratching his head for a minute in astonishment, and then struck

Leonardo's gun aside, muttering, 'She'll do it if you touch him, Leonardo ; I am sure she will—I know her of old. Let him be. We had better carry him down to the cave just to quiet the child : we can then get her out of the way and soon dispose of him. —Well, we won't kill him, Francesca ; now, do be quiet and give me that stiletto.'

“ ‘No, no. I will keep it, and I will kill myself if you hurt him the least bit.’

“The men grumbled a good deal at having to carry me, and I could hardly help laughing as one of them growled out that he had often heard of a hen-pecked husband, but never of a chicken-pecked father before. However, Carlo seemed to be their captain, and they did not venture to dispute his decision ; nor was the risk of being seen very great, for the place was lonely and our path to the cave ran through tangled brushwood the whole way. First wrapping a scarf round me, therefore, that they might

not be tracked by my blood, they lifted me and carried me off, whilst Francesca marched some yards behind them, like a little Joan of Arc, still holding the stiletto, and keeping a jealous eye on their movements.

“What they dignified with the name of a cave, was only a small low hole three or four yards in diameter, and situated at the foot of some rocks not far from the shore. The mouth was barely wide enough to admit a man crawling in on his breast, and, besides being hidden by a fallen tree, was carefully concealed by a heap of dead branches, so that it would have been impossible for any one to discover the place who was not previously acquainted with it. Into this rat-hole, first removing the branches, Carlo dragged me roughly enough; my little guardian following, and the other two scamps disappearing as quickly as they could, for fear of chance passers-by. I had

been trying, as they brought me along, to think of some mode of seconding Francesca's efforts in my behalf, and I took the opportunity of Carlo's being alone.

“ ‘This is a bad business,’ I said to him—I speak Italian pretty well ; ‘why should you kill me ? You have got all I have about me, and why not let me go ? I will promise, for this little girl's sake, not to inform against you.’

“ ‘Pardon me, signor,’ he answered, politely, ‘but you do not quite understand the matter. It was not the little trifle of money about you which induced me to undertake this unpleasant affair, for which, on your account, I am truly sorry ; but it is my promise. I have given my word to kill you, and in Italy one's word is sacred.’

“ At first I hardly believed him, for I did not then know that I had an enemy in the world ; but his manner soon convinced me that he spoke the truth, though he declined

to give me the slightest clue to the name of the scoundrel who had employed him : *that* I only learned afterwards. I then tried him on the same tack as Francesca had done, but trying to avoid offending his prejudices.

“ ‘ You say your word is sacred, and I do not deny that under most circumstances it is your duty to keep it. But it is also your duty, you will allow, not to injure, but, on the contrary, to protect one to whom your daughter is so much indebted—you heard what she said, yourself. The present is a question between two conflicting duties, and, as you must violate one, it ought to be the one which will lie least heavily on your conscience.’ ”

“ ‘ True, most true. But the signor’s life is very valuable,’ he said, with a grin : ‘ the price for him is—immense ; and before I can get it I am to prove that he is dead by producing this locket,’ and the scamp

showed me in his rascally palm the treasure, Kate, that I valued most. My first impulse was to kick him, but just then I had not the power, nor could I even show my anger with any safety.

“ ‘Is that all?’ said I, trying my hand for once at a little Jesuitry: ‘well, if you have only to produce the locket as evidence, why not produce it and be hanged to you—getting your money, while at the same time you perform the higher duty of the two I mentioned, in saving your daughter’s benefactor.’

“ ‘Though he was evidently taken with the notion, after a time he replied, ‘But the gentleman in whose service I am might ask inconvenient questions.’

“ ‘Nay,’ I answered, at a venture, ‘all your word binds you to do is to produce the locket. Besides, you may surely trust your Italian wit to answer without committing yourself. And if you treat me so

badly, how can you expect the saints to raise up another protector to Francesca when you are gone ?’

“ ‘ I am glad to see the signor is so good a Catholic : I thought all Englishmen were heretics,’ quoth the scamp, devoutly crossing himself with an unction that nearly made me laugh outright.

“ My last argument, added to the rest, and to the entreaties of Francesca, who was now calmer but did not cease to plead for me, had shaken him a good deal ; still I could see he was not yet won. I thought it high time, therefore, to shoot my last arrow. .

“ ‘ I tell you what,’ I said ; ‘ if you treat me well, I’ll give you five hundred ducats ransom.’

“ His eyes glistened, and I perceived he was mine : ‘ Ah, that alters the case,’ he said ;—‘ but it is not enough.’

“ ‘ It is all you will get,’ I said, ‘ and

you will have to wait till I receive it from England. If you will not take it, kill me or not as you like ; I am tired of talking,' and I turned on my side away from him.

“ ‘ Well, then, so be it—five hundred,’ he said : ‘ but only supposing I get the other money in exchange for the locket. If I do not, the signor, I fear, must make up his mind to die. But if all goes well, I will return for him to-night with a boat, as this place is not safe.’ ”

“ Then, as my life had now become of some value to him, he examined my wounds, which he pronounced not very dangerous, and bound up with a skill acquired, no doubt, from many similar adventures. He even pulled in two or three of the branches for me to lie on, and left us a flask of wine and some provisions. Francesca remained with me, and after strictly enjoining her not to sing or to speak above a whisper, the conscientious

Carlo went off, carefully replacing the boughs about the entrance.

“I need not dwell on the next few hours : what with the pain of my wounds and my anxious thoughts, they were dreary enough. After I had whispered my thanks to Francesca, who only answered (I hope you will not be jealous, Kate) by kisses, there was absolutely nothing to break the monotony but the sounds of the wind and sea outside, and a gentle whisper now and then from my little guardian, who sat patiently by me all the time, occasionally handing me a bite of something or a drink of wine. About midnight Carlo returned in high spirits : fortunately for me, he had succeeded in getting his money, and he chuckled very much over the fact that his employer was so chary of seeming to have anything to do with the attempted assassination that he had scarcely asked any questions, and after receiving the locket had

dismissed Carlo with all speed. One of the rascals, I found, had been impudent enough to go to my lodgings and in my name obtain my portmanteau. This circumstance, however, though they had plundered the luggage of the few valuables it contained, was rather lucky for me; for they afterwards most graciously allowed me to take a change of my own clothes.

“I was now carried to a boat which lay in wait just below the cave, but I remember little of our voyage except that it lasted four or five hours and that they took the precaution to blindfold me. During the day we slept in another hole, and next night, after spending several hours in the boat again, we reached our destination, which was in some ruins a mile or two away from the sea-coast. My eyes were still covered, so that it was difficult for me to make out what passed, but they lowered me apparently with a good deal of trouble

down a rude staircase, and then carried me a few yards further and laid me on some straw. Here they removed the bandage from my eyes, and on looking round I found that I was in the corner of a large chamber, which seemed to be either the cellar or dungeon of some old fortress ; for I knew by the damp, heavy atmosphere that I was certainly underground. In the centre of the room blazed a large wooden fire, round which were seated seven or eight brigands whom I had not seen before. I was glad to perceive, however, that they all seemed to recognise Carlo as their leader.

“ This was my place of confinement during the whole time I stayed with them ; except that, when I grew stronger and was able to walk, and therefore possibly to escape, they moved me into an inner chamber leading out of their own and only divided from it by a strong door which they carefully locked at night. On the

whole they treated me kindly, for they supplied me with better food than they used themselves, and allowed Francesca to wait on me and be my nurse ; an office in which she had immediately installed herself, and which she filled with unvarying kindness the whole time I was among them.

“ After a day or two, when I could use my hands, I became most anxious to write and assure you of my safety ; for I feared you might hear of my disappearance, and naturally conclude I was murdered : I also wished, of course, to procure money from London to pay my ransom. But till his employer in this rascally business was safely out of the country, Carlo would on no account allow me to write a single line, lest he should himself suffer for his breach of faith in not killing me. On this point, therefore, I was forced to rest content, but on another I was more

determined, namely, to procure any letters that might be lying for me at Naples, as I hoped very fondly there might possibly be one from Reinsber amongst them. These, after some deliberation, he consented to get for me when he should go near Naples ; and I found that he did not regard the task as a very dangerous one, for these fellows have ‘respectable’ acquaintance everywhere, who are ready to undertake any delicate business of the kind. One of his friends, he said, should take my passport to the post-office and (if the officials remembered anything about my assassination, which Carlo thought very unlikely) should say he was sent ‘by Signor Holden’s relatives, who had come to look after his effects.’ For my part, if I got what I wanted, I did not care how he managed it.

“Carlo was away for more than a fortnight on some of his expeditions ; but when he returned he had not only secured my

letters in the way he suggested but brought me news of all that had happened since my disappearance, including the noble efforts of my friend Signor Smythe (under which incognito if you remember Lord Stainmore passed at Naples) to discover me and my murderers. The Italian always mentioned Signor Smythe's name with a peculiar relish which I did not then understand, but which I afterwards found to arise from a profound admiration of his lordship's talents for duplicity. He also informed me of the burial, as mine, of a body which had been washed ashore some distance down the bay. I can only account for the mistake by supposing that the features of the corpse were much decomposed, and by the fact that I had assumed the ordinary Neapolitan dress, to pursue my work without attracting so much attention. No doubt, too, as the sea was so near the spot where I had been painting, every one was expecting my body to turn

up in some such way, and the police required very little evidence of my identity. Carlo brought me a more agreeable piece of information when he told me that his employer had now left the country, and that I might write home for the money whenever I liked.

“ I remember well with what anxiety, as soon as Carlo, swaggering across the floor as usual, had left the room, I turned to my letters, Francesca holding me a blazing faggot by way of torch, and looking nearly as eager for good news as myself. I tore open Mrs. Oliphant’s letter, and then the one enclosed from you. I have told you their purport, and you may imagine my feelings. I must have read them half a dozen times before I dashed them down, having at last got a glimmering of their meaning. My other letters I never read for weeks.”

“ Dear Frank !” exclaimed Kate, sympathetically, at this point.

Holden answered with a laugh and a caress. "Oh, it is all right now. Well, all my life up to that time, and even in my present strait, I had always enjoyed capital spirits, thinking everything would come right in the end—as it has, you see. But just then I confess I was what Harry Highside would call 'completely floored.' I began to know what people meant by despair, rather to believe in Byron, and all that sort of thing ; and in my present weak state the shock proved too great for me. I was very ill for a week or two, Francesca nursing me through ; and even afterwards—but why dwell on this ? You had tolerable proof yourself to-night that even at this distant date your supposed letter had altered me a good deal. For a time what grieved me most was that Carlo had not succeeded in killing me : then the thought occurred to me that I would live to revenge myself on you—don't laugh, Kate ;

you see I am treating you as my lady-confessor, and being very penitent, I must tell everything—yes, to revenge myself by becoming an illustrious artist with all the world at my feet. *Then* you should see whom you had jilted, because, forsooth, he was poor and obscure!”

“Well, I hope you will still show us what you are, Frank,” said Kate, laughing, “and not permit recent events to smother up all these glories from the world.”*

“I do not know about that,” replied Frank; “I rather think I shall now resume my high moral tone about fame—tell you in old saws and proverbs that it is a vapour, a shadow, an illusion—and exercise a proper philosopher’s contempt for it, more especially as I find the pyramid higher and the sides steeper than I thought. How-

* The sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world.

K. Hen. IV.

ever, I dare say I was silly enough. To resume.

“I had now Carlo’s gracious permission to write to you, but your letter made me careless about the main object I had proposed to myself, namely, that I might assure you of my safety. In my shame and anger I was now as anxious to be thought dead both by you and all the world (at least until I should have become famous under another name) as I was just before to be thought alive. I resolved therefore to let the current account of my death pass for true, and only wrote to a London friend, on whose discretion I could rely, to draw my money from a certain bank there and send it to me under an assumed name that I might procure my freedom. This was about a month after I fell into their hands, and more than another month elapsed before I received any answer. As they would not allow me to go outside, I spent the interval partly in

sketching Francesca and the brigands by the firelight, partly in brooding over my imaginary wrongs, and partly in listening to the strange tales these fellows narrated as they sat smoking their pipes at night; but I soon began to have another cause for deep anxiety."

CHAPTER IV.

FRANK'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED.

“**A**LL along, when the brigands thought I was not listening, I had heard snatches of grumbling from some of the band at the long stay I was making among them and the trouble which I gave them in mounting guard or procuring provisions for me ; but when no answer came to my letters, though I had written once or twice, their dissatisfaction began to assume a more threatening aspect. Still Carlo, when he was present, had influence enough to repress these murmurs and tried hard to keep me in ignorance of them. But one night the band came home in great disorder, by ones and twos, bearing evident marks of a

defeat; and Carlo, ever the foremost in attack, was missing, with two others. Later in the night, however, they found the captain somewhere and brought him in, mortally wounded. It turned out that they had attacked a band of well-armed travelers who succeeded in beating them off.

“Francesca’s grief was terrible to witness; for her father was the only living thing she ever had, in that vile society, to love. But Carlo himself, though aware that his end was approaching, was very calm, and, determined to be master to the very last, gave his orders to the band as usual. Like any other good Catholic, dying in the odour of sanctity, he derived great consolation from a little crucifix which he carried about him and hugged and kissed perpetually. I endeavoured, of course as delicately as I could, to open his eyes to the wickedness of a life spent in robbery and murder, but I cannot say that my ministrations had much effect.

“The next day he seemed anxious to speak to me and, sending all the band away on different errands, called me and Francesca to his side. He then gave me the letter which I had been expecting so long from my London friend, and which he had procured at Naples two or three days before, but in the excitement of last night's disaster had forgotten to deliver. I was very glad to find enclosed a letter of credit on a Neapolitan bank for two hundred pounds, which was all I possessed in the world, and that the delay in replying to my notes had only arisen from my friend being on a tour in France.

“When I had read the letter and told Carlo that it contained the letter of credit which I had been looking for, he had much to say to me. He first gave me the whole history of his transaction with Signor Smythe, an account of which, copied from his own lips and with Francesca's name as

witness, you will find in the bundle of papers I gave you, Kate ; and it was with no little amazement and horror that I found the scoundrel who had employed him was my seeming friend, Lord Stainmore. Even then, though events have since enlightened me, I was at a loss to guess the cause of his hatred. I could not doubt Carlo's statement however ; his manner, the fact that he knew himself to be dying, and his accurate description of Lord Stainmore, all convinced me that he was speaking the truth. The brigand then, with more feeling than I thought he possessed, implored my protection for Francesca, who would be exposed, he said, to great danger from his rough lawless comrades after he was gone ; nor was he willing, though he had been guilty of so much crime himself, that she should continue to breathe the same filthy atmosphere. He wished her to be a good girl, and to be brought up amongst honest peo-

ple ; and begged me, by all that was sacred, to see her placed in some respectable family.

“ You may be sure that, if only from gratitude to Francesca, I readily enough undertook this commission. He was very grateful, and then warned me repeatedly against his brother ruffians, who were inclined to kill me, he said, even if I gave them the money. My best chance of escaping with my life, he thought, was to hold the ransom back till I had an opportunity of showing them my heels. Francesca might join me afterwards ; and perhaps I should not think he was asking too much if he begged me to spend a little of what was to have been my ransom on her education instead. With some of his old conscientiousness he tried to prove that, as the contract for ransom was made between us two alone, no one else and certainly none of the band had anything to do with the matter, and that, as captain also, he had a

right to absolve me from my part of the agreement if he wished : which he accordingly did, transferring his rights, he said, to his daughter.

“ I scarcely believed that even these ruffians could be so treacherous as to take the money and still butcher me, but I resolved to gather their intentions from their own lips if possible. Accordingly that night after Carlo was dead (for he expired the same day,) and when the band were assembling round the fire, I lounged into their room, and after some chat pretended to drop asleep. As I had often gone off on a doze whilst amongst them, my drowsiness excited no surprise, and the conversation went on, being naturally for the most part about their deceased captain. I pricked my ears, however, when they began to whisper and talk of myself; and I had the pleasure of hearing them discuss my future treatment and fate. One or

two, I found, were for killing me at once ; they did not believe I should ever be ransomed at all : and one or two were for waiting for the money, and then honestly letting me go. The majority, however, decided on waiting a little longer till I paid them, and quietly cutting my throat afterwards ; for they agreed that, if I were once free, I should be able, through my influence with Francesca, to persuade her to turn traitor and show the police all the haunts of the band. As this seemed their final resolution, I awoke with a slight yawn, and went to my bed in the other room to concoct a plan of escape, which now seemed my only hope in this rather alarming state of things. Before I bade them good-night, however, I took care to tell them, as if casually, that Carlo had brought me a letter, and that I ‘should get at my money’ within a week, feeling sure that to name so early a date would confirm them in their inten-

tion of waiting for the ransom. Both on account of Francesca, and because the delay would certainly give me more time for my arrangements, and perhaps even a chance of surveying for myself the mode of exit from our underground apartments, I determined, before attempting anything, to wait for Carlo's funeral, which was fixed for the day but one after he expired.

“I spent the interval in considering the various difficulties I should have to encounter, and the best mode of overcoming each of them. From Carlo's description before he died, and many inquiries at various times from Francesca, added to my own observations, I knew the bearings of the place tolerably well. Both the apartments, as I have said, were underground, and mine was the inner one : it was divided from the other simply by a very strong oak door opening inwards, and which, the better to secure me, they always locked on the out-

side after I had retired to rest. Neither of the rooms had any window or chimney, and there was no exit whatever to the open air except by passing through the outer chamber, in which there was always a fire, and which was occupied by the band. Through this room, therefore, it was necessary for me to slip unobserved, and then I knew that I should come to a narrow dark passage, a few yards in length, at the end of which was the only means of access to the surface. This was curious enough, for it was nothing else than an absolutely perpendicular shaft, some sixty feet in height, circular, and in diameter rather wider than an ordinary draw-well. Such an ingenious approach to the subterranean apartments, which were intended perhaps for a last refuge in case of attack, had no doubt been made in this form by the builders of the old fortress above to deceive any possible assailants into the belief that the shaft

was merely the well which supplied the castle with water and led to nothing beyond. Up the sides, however, curving round and round, and about three feet apart, were strong bars of wood, forming a sort of rude spiral staircase to the top. Each bar or step had one end firmly fixed in the side of the shaft, but only extended half-way across ; and, the better to avoid a discovery of the staircase by any one looking down the pit from above, the five steps nearest the surface were made of iron, and movable. It was one of the laws of the band that any one ascending or descending the staircase should remove these five steps after him and place them, if he were coming down, in a cupboard made for them in the shaft, and in going up, under a large stone at the top. There were thus, of course, two sets of iron bars ; and though it might seem very difficult and dangerous for any inexperienced person to fix them in their several

holes, these active mountaineers did it with the greatest ease and rapidity.

“Above the mouth of the shaft was a small room, only partially dark, for it was quite in ruins and the roof gone. Beyond this, again, were other remains of the old fortress, somewhere amongst which a sentinel was always posted night and day; but, if I could once pass him, there was tangled forest beyond, which was likely to afford a good chance of escape. These, then, were the difficulties I had to encounter; namely, to get out of my own room, pass through that of the brigands, ascend the dark staircase, and elude the sentinel outside. I certainly thought the enterprise rather hazardous, but, on the whole, I determined to try, and made my preparations accordingly.

“Without pressing my request, lest the gang should suspect my real purpose, I asked them for leave to attend Carlo’s

funeral—on the ground of his friendship for me. Somewhat to my surprise they consented, being probably deceived by a liveliness of manner which I had assumed during the last day or two, and which they ascribed no doubt to my thinking I should soon be ransomed. As Carlo was to be buried in the ruins, and all the band, some twenty of them, would be there, I did not anticipate the slightest chance of escape during this visit to the open air, but I thought I should learn more about the place from a single sight of it than from a hundred descriptions, however faithful; and this I found to be actually the case, though Carlo and Francesca's accounts were quite correct. After the funeral we all returned to the vault, I making careful note of everything, and more especially counting the number of steps in the staircase, which I found were twenty-three in all. I also observed where the iron bars were placed, when they were removed.

“ I had difficulty in making up my mind on two points. The first was whether it would be better to attempt escape at night or during the day ; for the latter course had some great advantages, such as these—that my door was then unlocked, and I had ready access to the other room, where there were often only one or two of the gang in the day-time, and of course it would be easier to elude the observation of two men than of a dozen. Then I should have more light for my chief obstacle, the ascent of the dangerous staircase, and should also be able to see my way better and run faster when I got outside. On the whole, however, after much deliberation, I preferred night for the enterprise ; for then the fellows in the room, though more numerous, would be sleepy and less observant, and if I once passed them, I should know where they were ; whereas in the day-time they would be prowling all about the wood,

and it was highly probable that some of them would fall in with me there and shoot me down. Darkness, too, I thought, would be more in my favour than theirs, if I once got into the forest.

“ My other doubt was whether I should tell Francesca of my proposed flight and even offer to take her with me, or should simply give her an address in Naples and ask her to meet me there. I need scarcely say that I was not afraid of her betraying my plans to the band wilfully ; but I feared, that being such a child, she might rouse their suspicions by some change in her manner, or some unintentional hint. Still, I could not bear the thought of leaving her in such company, particularly as it was quite possible the gang might accuse her after my flight of being an accessory, and then there was no telling what treatment, being now fatherless and without any protector, she might have to endure at their

ruffianly hands. I resolved therefore at last to trust in her discretion and ask her to accompany me if she liked. If she did, her local knowledge might be of some use, though this was likely to be amply counterbalanced by her want of speed, if our flight were discovered soon and we had to run for our lives.

“ Carlo had been buried in the morning, and I decided on making my attempt the same night, though I did not acquaint Francesca with my intention till evening. I found, however, that I might with safety have confided in her earlier. After the first burst of grief was over, she seemed to cling to me, and, when I mentioned my project, was delighted with it, and strenuous in her determination to share my fate. I showed her clearly the dangers we should incur, but her father's last words had made a deep impression on her, and she was both anxious to change her mode of life and also

afraid of remaining any longer with the gang. It was agreed, therefore, that she should go with me.

“During the day, under pretence of requiring it for a salad at dinner, I procured a considerable quantity of oil, which I applied plentifully to the rusty hinges of my door that always creaked abominably when it was opened. After repeatedly applying the oil, however, I had the satisfaction of finding the door open gently enough not to waken a man who was sound asleep. Without being observed I also got a small bar from the other room, and with this wrenched out of the doorpost a strong iron staple which received the bolt of the lock. A long business it was, for I had to work by snatches and without attracting notice; but as I had all the day for the job and for oiling the hinges, I succeeded in forcing the staple out at last, and then replaced it in the wood, but so slightly as to be easily

removed, while the change would not be noticed when they locked the door on me at night. In the evening, when Francesca had become my confederate, I made her burn up all the dry pieces of wood which had been placed in readiness near the fire in the other chamber, and supply their place, before the band assembled at night, with the greenest logs she could find in a large heap which was always stored in my own room. I knew the damp faggots would fill the room with smoke, and render my slipping through unobserved a much easier matter than if the air was clear. It was also arranged that, as soon as the brigands were all asleep, she was to get outside on pretence of being sick with the smoke; and that after going upstairs she was to leave the iron steps in the sides of the shaft, ready for myself, and then to hold the sentinel in conversation till she heard my signal. I was glad to see that,

during the rest of the evening, she maintained her ordinary demeanour and gave no sign in any way of our project.

“When the men came in, about eight o’clock, and began feeding the fire, there was much grumbling at the smoke, and abundance of curses at Francesca’s stupidity in having forgotten to put any wood to dry before the fire. Her excuses, however, which she delivered with a coolness and presence of mind that astonished me in such a child, and in which she ascribed her negligence to grief at her father’s death, passed off very well, and she was pardoned, not however without many warnings never to be guilty of the same conduct again, which she readily promised. For myself, I affected great joy at the prospect of my speedy liberation, and some sorrow at having to part so soon from such good comrades—a sentiment, I remember, which drew from Leonardo, who never forgot the

blow I had given him at the ruins, the sly observation that ‘perhaps, after all, the signor might not leave his poor friends so soon, and that he himself hoped I might stay with them much longer than I now fancied.’ The rest of them tittered at this, thinking, of course, I did not understand his allusion; but I let them enjoy their mirth, in the hope that, before the night was over, the laugh would be on my side, when they found I had left them even sooner than they expected. For the remainder of the evening they told tales, and, quite forgetting poor Carlo, sang noisy songs, in which they forced Francesca to join. However, about ten, I retired to my own room, and was duly locked in, the band composing themselves to sleep soon afterwards, whilst I kept on the watch by the closed door, partly looking through the keyhole and partly listening at the wide chink below the door.

“An hour or two had passed before I heard Francesca get up and say to the brigand nearest her that she was sick with this nasty smoke and would go upstairs till she was better. He growled something in reply to the effect that ‘he was glad she did suffer from the smoke, as she had made it,’ and with a curse and a yawn went off to sleep again. I then distinctly heard her go up the stairs, and was delighted to observe that her departure excited no attention. Living in a constant atmosphere of danger, these men seemed always able in their deepest slumbers instinctively to recognise and disregard any noise made by one of themselves, whereas they would awake instantly at the lightest tread of a stranger.

“That the brigands might have ample time to fall asleep again, I had agreed with Francesca to wait for half an hour after her departure before I opened my door. They

had, of course, taken my watch ; but that I might make no mistake in my anxiety, and as being a few minutes too soon might spoil everything, I counted up to sixty thirty times in succession, meanwhile removing very gently the loosened staple which alone held the bolt.

“I confess it was with a beating heart that, as I came to the end of my last sixty, and when I had satisfied myself once more by their loud breathing that none of them was awake, I opened the door a little, and then, after a rapid survey of the position of the various sleepers, slipped noiselessly into their apartment. One of them was actually laid at full length within three feet of my door ; but still I determined to close it after me, if possible, that they might not discover my flight till morning. For this purpose, as there was no latch or handle, I had provided a small piece of wood, sharp-

ened at one end ; and now, dropping on my knees and watching the gang as I worked, I held the door close whilst I passed the other hand beneath it, and tried to support it by fixing my peg against it at the back. It was a thing not very easy to do in any case, and still more difficult when my eyes were elsewhere. However, I had partly succeeded when I saw that the slight grating of the peg against the panel had wakened one of the brigands, but fortunately not the one close to me. The fellow began muttering, and turned himself half over ; but before his eyes were quite open I had laid myself flat on the ground, almost touching the nearest scoundrel, but keeping my eyes on them, and resolved not to fall now without a hard fight for my life. The man who had heard the noise was evidently suspicious, for he raised himself to a sitting posture and looked carefully about. The fire, however, had partly died down,

and there was still a good deal of smoke in the room, so that he seemed to perceive nothing amiss. But as I was congratulating myself on this good fortune, he suddenly rose to his feet. That was an anxious moment for me, I can tell you. I was on the point of springing up and making a bound for the staircase, when I saw that he was only going to feed the fire. After throwing on a few fresh logs, and giving another sleepy look round, he again lay down ; but I was forced to wait what seemed an eternity, till his hard breathing showed me he was asleep once more.

“It was plainly dangerous to attempt fastening the door completely, so I left it as it was—ajar; and, still lying flat, crept and wormed myself by slow degrees towards the side where the arms of the band were deposited against the wall. I selected a stiletto and a couple of pistols, taking care that the latter were loaded, though the

examination occupied some more valuable time. When I had once got these, I rose boldly and stepped across the rest of the chamber, and over some of the sleepers, without rousing them.

“ The dark passage offered no difficulties, but when I reached the staircase, I found I had enough work before me still. The place was pitch-dark, and I had to balance myself on each narrow and slippery step in succession, and then, supporting myself by holding the one immediately above me with my left hand, grope with my right for the next step still ; and all this without making the slightest noise. The steps being so far apart, it was the very hardest work I ever had in my life, and took a long time ; but I got on pretty well till I reached the movable iron bars. I drew a long breath of thankfulness when I grasped the first of these, for I knew now there were only five steps left, and I had also a little

more light from above. I could now hear Francesca talking to the man outside, and her voice had a strangely cheering influence on me, covered as I was with perspiration and exhausted with my efforts.

“ In a minute more my heart was in my mouth ; for, as I lifted my foot off the first iron bar I had come to, I felt it give way, and in a moment more, ping!—ping!—ping! it went to the bottom, striking every one of the wooden steps below in succession. I stood still for a second, listening—in the absurd hope that those below might not have heard the sound ; and at the same instant I heard dear little Francesca raise her voice and talk more loudly to the sentinel. I was sure that her ear had caught the noise, and that, with wonderful presence of mind, she was trying to divert the man’s attention from it. In this, too, she seemed to have succeeded, for he did not stir from the place where he was.

“But how about those below? In the one second I listened, all doubt on the point was over; first a subdued murmuring, then a loud talking, then a confused hubbub, came from the depths, and I was certain that all the gang was fully roused. With the energy of despair, and in haste, I turned to the remainder of my work, and, by a sudden thought suggested by the falling of the other bar, tore out each step after quitting it, and carried it to the top with me. Of course, to do this I had to support myself by clinging with my feet and one hand to the bars above; but I thought the additional time thus occupied, and the imminent risk of a fall, would be amply compensated if I could detain the ruffians below even for a few minutes; and I had hopes that this would be the case, as all the iron bars except one would now be at the top of the shaft.

“I had drawn out the last step and fallen

exhausted on the surface, putting the bars quietly down beside me, when some one rushing to the bottom of the pit shouted loudly to the sentry outside, 'Leonardo! Leonardo!' and I heard my old acquaintance—for it was his luck to be sentry that night—break away from Francesca, and advance hurriedly to see what the matter was. I had just time to rise and place myself in a dark corner of the ruined wall, drawing my stiletto as I did so, when he came and stood by the mouth of the shaft within three feet of me. I held my breath till I should hear what they said.

" 'Leonardo!' cried the man at the bottom again.

" 'Well, what's up now?' asked my friend.

" 'Oh, you're there at last. Has any one passed you from below?'

" 'Not a soul: here's little Francesca outside with me, that is all.'

“ ‘The signor’s door is ajar, and we don’t know whether he is in his room or not : we don’t much like to go in and see, in case he is still there.’

“Some one, however, of less modesty had evidently by this time penetrated my chamber, for the tumult increased, and I could hear shouts below: ‘Yes, he is gone—he is fled!—the signor—the Englishman!’

“To have hesitated another second would have been madness. I had shrunk, I cannot tell you how much, dear Kate, from shedding blood, especially without a fair stand-up fight, and I had been in hopes of getting an opportunity of slipping past Leonardo without hurting him, but this was now doubly impossible. I sprang forward, and with a single push—ah, how easy!—hurled him head foremost down the shaft. His shriek as he fell, and the fearful *thunge* with which his body first struck the steps in its headlong descent—thence going to

the bottom with a succession of dull heavy blows—all this it was long before I forgot.”

“It was a dreadful necessity, Frank,” said Kate; “but of course you were right. There was Francesca.”

“Yes—yes; I think I was. At least, I know I should do it again under the same circumstances. I was glad, when I came to think the matter over afterwards, that it happened to be Leonardo, for this man had always been the most eager of them all for my death; and I was glad, too, that I had given him a rather greater chance of life by throwing him down than if I had used the stiletto—my only alternative. But let us talk no more of it.

“I now called Francesca in a low voice and found her close by my side. I clasped her hand and, starting off together at a quick pace, we were soon out of the ruins. I endeavoured to procure some information

from her as we ran, about the easiest way of getting out of the forest, or the direction in which the nearest village lay, but she was so frightened and utterly bewildered by having seen Leonardo's sudden descent and heard the furious shouts below that it was impossible to extract a reasonable answer. The only thing to be done, therefore, was to strike into the forest and trust to chance.

“The night was overcast, which made it very dark under the trees and delayed us much, as we were forced to use the utmost caution to avoid stumbling over rocks and fallen trunks with which the place abounded. When we came to a more open glade, I took Francesca up in my arms and ran, trying to encourage her at the same time. In this way we had plodded on at the utmost speed we could use, for half-an-hour or three quarters, and began to entertain strong hopes that we were safe, when we

heard voices not more than a hundred yards from us. I was carrying the girl at the time, and felt the poor thing begin trembling again. I have since thought that, in the darkness and our utter ignorance of any route, we must have wandered on somewhat in a circle and have been at this time much nearer the ruins than we supposed.

“How often a single fault, Kate, spoils a fair picture ! I had been somewhat congratulating myself on my wonderful plans for escape, but I saw when I joined Francesca that I had made one terrible blunder—and it nearly proved fatal to us both : her dress was almost white, visible for fifty yards round even in the present darkness ! How in the world I could be so stupid as to overlook such an important circumstance, and one which might so easily have been guarded against, I cannot tell, unless it was from my only deciding so short a time

before we actually started, to take her with me, and my having many other things to think of.

“But you must not imagine we stopped to entertain these fine reflections then. We had, of course, to make the best of things as they were. My own notion, when we first heard the voices, was for both of us to creep under some thick bushes on the chance of the brigands not observing us in spite of the white dress. It was our wisest course, but Francesca was now almost frantic with terror, and declared positively that she would not, durst not, stay so near them. Still carrying her, therefore, I proceeded as cautiously as possible in the opposite direction to that from which the shouts came, but, step as I liked, I was not woodman enough to avoid treading on a dry stick now and then. We advanced in this way about two hundred yards, and I had put Francesca down the better to make

our way through some thick brush-wood, she following me at the distance of three or four yards, when I heard some one spring out of the wood, and instantly afterwards a faint shriek from the girl and the words, 'Oh, they have got me! Fly, signor, fly!'

"I turned and saw that one of the rufians had seized her, with one of his hands uplifted ready to strike; for there was something gleaming in it, which I had little doubt was a stiletto. All this seemed to pass through my mind like lightning—then springing forward, I grappled with him in a struggle for life or death.

"When he saw me he had loosened his hold of Francesca, the better to defend himself—and he was right, for he had to contend with a desperate man. In my rush I succeeded in seizing his uplifted right arm with my left hand, and he made frantic efforts to do the same kind turn to mine. The struggle was short and fierce

—breast on breast, limbs intertwined, our faces almost touching each other; I could paint every line, every tint on his features now—his black eyes glaring almost out of their sockets with terror and fury—his cheeks and brow pale as a sheet—his teeth clenched—his long black hair straggling about his face. Not a word was said by either of us. He was a stronger man than myself, but I remembered a trick or two of wrestling from my school-days, and I threw him heavily, falling on him myself. Then he gave one loud cry for help, struggling still, and by his superior strength might soon have reversed our positions if he could once have secured my right arm, which he tried hard enough to do. But I was in no mood for trifling, and brought down my hand with full force from above on his breast, sweeping down his arm with the strength of the blow and burying my stiletto in him to the hilt. I

felt a great shudder pass over the body, and it relaxed its grasp of me. Then I sprang up and, seizing Francesca, hurried on again, as his shout would certainly bring the whole band to the place.

“ We had gone perhaps a hundred yards farther when we came to a large boulder stone, a remarkable object. Francesca seemed to recognise it and whispered joyfully, ‘ O signor, the oak—the hollow oak ! It is very near.’

“ ‘ Does the band know of it ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ No, no,—no one but myself, I think.’

“ ‘ Which way, then ? ’

“ Luckily the chance of safety had restored the terrified child in some measure to her equanimity, and she found her way to the tree, which was only twenty or thirty yards distant. This was a truly fortunate circumstance, for I was so tired with her weight and my various exertions, that I really do not think I could have gone much

farther, while we already heard some of the men talking over the dead body of their comrade, a little distance behind us.

“ We crept into the big tree through a very narrow opening, and found there was just room enough for both of us. Francesca told me in whispers that she had found this tree in some of her wanderings about the ruins, and had often come to it since, using the big stone as a mark ; otherwise, she did not think she could have found it at all in her present fright. She thought the tree was not more than half a mile from the old fortress.

“ In this place of security, then, we stayed for fully a couple of hours, several times hearing some of the band pass and repass us, on which occasions we scarcely dared to breathe, and Francesca crept closer to me. But the rest did us infinite good in recruiting our strength, and I was also able to get clearer information from the girl

as to our best route for the future. It seemed that close to the tree there was a little stream which Francesca had often followed for a mile or two, till she came to a broader valley and vineyards ; and she thought the nearest village was a few miles down the valley, but on this point she was by no means certain, as she had only been there once. She was sure, however, that we should be able to get horses there if we could once reach the houses. As the vineyards, at any rate, were a sign of civilized life, I decided on following the stream down till we reached the more level country, where I did not doubt we should soon fall in with some kind of a road. I also made Francesca put my large loose jacket over her dress, to render her a little less conspicuous.

“ As all had been quiet for some time, we were thinking of making a start, when we heard a sound in the distance, but ap-

parently coming nearer, which hastened us off. This was the yelp of a little dog which the child pronounced to be Dominico's, one of the band, and which we immediately concluded they were bringing to scent us out. It appears strange they had not thought of the dog before, but Francesca said that Dominico was absent from the ruins that night on some expedition, and perhaps had taken his dog with him ; nor did I remember myself to have noticed him in the room.

“I felt confident of escape now, for with my pistols and stiletto I considered myself ‘good’ for at any rate three or four of the fellows ; so, telling Francesca to keep up her courage, as we should easily get over this little difficulty after surmounting so many much more formidable, I made her hasten down the middle of the brook to destroy all scent of her footsteps. I then crossed the stream myself and ran some twenty yards up the opposite bank, return-

ing quickly on my own traces, and hoping by this ruse to create a false scent for the dog, and make the men believe we had fled up the bank instead of down the stream. As I reached the water the second time, I heard the dog barking furiously about the corpse of the man I had killed, and the other brigands shouting and encouraging the animal to hunt us out.

“Following Francesca down the water-course I soon overtook her, and then carried her for a mile or two in my arms, keeping in the water and trusting to its sound to deaden any noise I made by false steps. I had ascertained from her that there were no deep pools or waterfalls along the brook, so that we were able to get on pretty quickly.”

“I thought you had rather a genius for waterfalls, Frank,” said Miss Oliphant.

“Ah, but I did not wish to see any just then. Our adventures were now nearly over ; for, although sounds reached us

for a long time from the neighbourhood of the oak-tree, they became fainter and at last died away altogether as we advanced. We saw nothing more of the brigands, and soon reached the vineyards and in time came to a decent road, which led to the village Francesca had mentioned. After a few hours' sleep, we took a carriage to Naples, where I placed the girl in a school attached to a convent ; and then, when I got from the place where he lodged, some further proofs of Lord Stainmore's complicity in the attempt on my life, I started for Syria and Palestine under my assumed name. When I returned to England last month, I heard with amazement that his lordship was the man to whom you were engaged ; and being determined, if possible, to save you from such a fate, though I was still burning with indignation at your fancied treatment of me, I wrote to you twice, telling you his character and offering to send

you my proofs. As you did not answer my letters, I came down to Stainton, resolved to have a private interview with you and fancifully selecting to-day for my visit because I had promised to return on this day if I were alive—walked over from Stainton and ascertained from one of the carles that you were in the church by yourself—waited for you outside—was so agitated, when you came out, that I could not speak to you—and the rest you know, all, all, dearest Kate, except my happiness. And now will you not give me a kiss to recompense me for all my privations and as pay for this long and highly interesting narrative?”

I think Kate let him take his pay in the coin he wished, but then she said, smiling, “I do not know at all what you mean about your happiness, Frank. If it has anything to do with me, pray dismiss the notion ; I have not made up my mind, and I shall not till I see my uncle.”

Holden was not so much dispirited by this avowal as might be imagined, and he contented himself with answering, laughingly, "All right, Kate."

"And now I want to see this note you say you got from me."

By the light of the farthing candle, Miss Oliphant read with changing colour the forged letter and that from her step-mother. She noticed carefully the dates, and when she had done, handed them back, saying hurriedly, but with an eye flashing scorn, "Oh come, Mr. Holden! Let us go."

"Go! but where, Kate?"

"To the Hall—to the Hall, to be sure. This is my step-mother's doing. Come: you have seen Kate Oliphant weak enough to-night; you must now see her in her strength."

END OF VOL. II.

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